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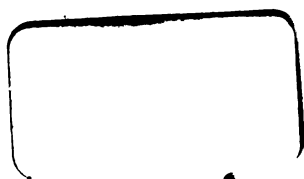
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CHRONICLES OF DARTMOOR.

BY

M R S. M A R S H.

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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CHAPTER I.

WHICH TREATS OF PARSON HILL'S WEAKNESS.

“MY dear Kate, a word with you,” said the vicar to Mrs. Hill, as she was leaving the breakfast-room.

“Quite at your service, most gracious sir,” said she.

“I must attend the archdeacon's visitation at — to-morrow. On such occasions I make it a practice to dine with my reverend brethren; I see them so seldom, and am so little in their world, that, when these periodical meetings occur, I make the most of them. Therefore, for one day, I must commit my house, and my visitor, Mrs. Harcourt, to your care.”

“I will do my best in your absence; but we shall all be sorry to lose you even for so short a time.”

"Ah! you are very good; and I am sure you will fill my place admirably; and of course do, in all things, as if you were in your own house, as, my dear Kate, I can assure you you always are when you are under my roof."

"Thank you—thank you; I do feel most comfortably at home," said Mrs. Hill.

"I am glad of it—such is my earnest wish. And, Kate, if the day be fine, as it promises, I will ride to Colnhampstead, and then, perhaps, you and Mrs. Harcourt would like a gallop—eh?"

"Certainly—that is, I can answer for myself."

"And I can answer for Mrs. Harcourt," said the vicar; "she is fond of a good scamper across the moor; she rides well, and the grey mare just suits her."

And the next morning, by half-past eight o'clock—for the archdeacon's visitation was at eleven—the horses came round. Sir Harry and Grey Bessie for the vicar and Mrs. Harcourt, Duchess and Butterfly for Charlie and Mrs. Hill.

When the party were within sight of Colnhampstead, Mrs. Harcourt said,

"But why are we obliged to leave you here and return to Lawsleigh? There is morning service, of course, before 'the charge;' why may we not go to church?"

"Why, indeed?" said the vicar. "I had not thought of that; but there will be no difficulty, the horses can be left at the 'Crown,' Marvel will take care of them."

"Then will you like to stay for the service?" said Mrs. Harcourt to Mrs. Hill.

"Very much. I commend you for the proposal. I suppose the people will not be amused with our hats and habits, will they?"

"There will be plenty of hats, and plenty of habits, to keep you in countenance," said Charlie.

"But all the very reverend and very venerable gentlemen, including myself," said the vicar, "will have something else to do than to ascertain whether you wear hats or habits, or come without either!"

When the service was over, the congregation, as well as the party from the moor, remained to hear the Archdeacon's charge. All the world is aware of the eloquence of the Venerable the Archdeacon

of —, and of his sound church principles. And that particular world, that listened so attentively to this particular charge, went away highly gratified, and fully contented. For the capacious and venerable edifice was crowded from one end to the other. There was a very full attendance of the clergy, and the laity were all eager to see and hear the new Archdeacon.

And as had been before agreed upon, the vicar remained to dine with the clergy, and the ladies and Charlie mounted their horses, and turned their heads homeward. And the party eventually reached Lawsleigh Vicarage, and, as Charlie said, “finished the day as well as they could.”

They expected Mr. Hill would return about nine P.M., and Mrs. Hill ordered coffee to be ready immediately on his arrival. But instead of the vicar, came only James Marvel and Sir Harry. There was a letter for Mrs. Hill, which we will take the liberty of perusing first, for there was a second for Mrs. Harcourt, enclosed in Mrs. Hill's.

“MY DEAR KATE,—I am almost ashamed to confess my weakness, but you are gracious and

charitable, and will probably make some allowance for the temptations to which 'boys,' both old and young, are subjected. I have always had a goodly store of 'weaknesses,' and every now and then, and at the most unexpected times, and in the most unlooked-for places, they 'crop up,' and make me shew myself to the world in all my natural—eh!—deformity. This is one of those extraordinary 'times,' for my own house is full of visitors, and yet I leave them to do as they please, or as they best can, and accept a 'visit' myself from my Archdeacon! And even you, merciful and compassionate as I know you to be, even you will think the Rectory at Colnhampstead, the residence of my friend the Archdeacon, a strange 'place' for any of my 'weaknesses' to come to a head, and overrule me to my great delight!—ahem! But—in your own mind—keep the Archdeacon out of the scrape—he has no 'weaknesses,'—at least none—like mine.

"And then, dear Kate, next Thursday, the 29th, is 'the ladies' day' at Teign-ton-pont! Ah! you smile, do you? Have you not greatly desired to make one at those very charming county meet-

ings, ever since you became 'one' of the county? You shall do so. That is, if you will allow me to direct your movements. But the fact is, that the match between the Plymouth Garrison and Teign-ton-pont comes off on Thursday. The Teign-ton-pont-ers had depended a good deal on the 'Great Western,' but unfortunately he is laid up with a sprained ankle. Well, some half-dozen fellows here actually laid violent hands on me! In spite of my 'cloth,'—as Gray would say—or even in spite of the Venerable the Archdeacon's 'carved' roof—it is magnificent, tell Charlie—and tried very hard to secure me in the place of the 'Great Western!' Mark that, Kate, 'in the place of!' that is to say, *not* a place in the Great Western, but in the place of the 'Great Western.' And I can assure you, my dear Kate, that the Teign-ton-pont-ers have 'a great loss' in the 'Great Western,' and that 'he' will be very poorly replaced by me, for I have already agreed to stand in his place. I have a weakness—it is in vain to try to hide it. I confess, therefore, that the idea was delightful to my ambitious mind!

“And then, Kate, I communed with myself—

and, said I—"Can I conscientiously leave the dear old Teign-ton-pont-ers in their dilemma at this present moment, to be heartily beaten by that first-rate Plymouth Garrison, and *not* raise a finger to help them! Perish the thought! And then, to cheer me up, I suppose, for I had some misgivings about 'my cloth,' they told me, in strict confidence, that the very sight of my old-fashioned figure, and the widely-spread prestige of my 'bowling,' would so inspirit the Teign-ton-pont-ers, as to make them worth ten times over what they are at this moment—hampered as they are by the stoppage of 'the Great Western,' a great loss to the shareholders!—and so depress the minds of the gallant Garrison, as to make them feel themselves suddenly cut off from laurels they had predetermined to win. These two effects of my presence virtually give the palm to the Teign-ton-pont-ers; and as they have 'the palm,' it is not unreasonable to hope that they will win 'the laurels.'"

"Upon the purest principles of philanthropy, therefore, I go to this match; and I may add that I shall *not* be disappointed if the ladies—for once in a way—turn aside from 'red,' and bet on

'black' as most likely to win. Tell Charlie—though by-the-bye he ought to know all about it—to see that our hampers are well stored, to let us have plenty of champagne, fruit too in plenty, and of the choicest in my preserves. George must attend you. I shall send posters (four) to-morrow; Marvel has my orders on that head. But to you, my dear Kate, I say, do not be late. Four posters, even though accustomed to these roads, *must* have their time; it is a long distance, a wearisome way for the poor dumb creatures, but then again I suppose, if they were not doing that, they would do something else—why, therefore, should I waste my pity? To-morrow, Tuesday, the archdeacon proposes to drive me to Buckleigh. We shall call at 'the Court,' on Mr. Tremelly. He has a great deal of property in Lawsleigh and the neighbourhood. From thence we go on to my dear old friend the vicar of Ashbystead, and lunch with him, returning here, D. V., for dinner. I am very glad, dear Kate, to have the opportunity of calling both at Buckleigh and Ashbystead, for they are so distant from my moorland home as to be almost shut out from me for ever,

although the dear masters of these locales will never lose their places in my heart and memory. I go to Teign-ton-pont on Wednesday. The match always begins the day before, and is concluded on the ladies' day. Bright eyes, shine your brightest! I have not attended a match for many years, though I have continued my subscription; for between ourselves, my dear Kate, the world has been gradually growing so good, that I had some doubts whether *they*—'the players'—would not think it a matter of conscience 'to bowl me off the ground,' instead of allowing me to have the intoxicating pleasure of 'bowling out' my adversaries! And again, my dear Kate, here on this moor I play cricket with the villagers of Lawsleigh, and any friends with me at the time. But I have, for many years, determined *not* to play cricket matches. 'There is no rule without an exception.' To play this match proves my rule; it is the exception to my ordinary conduct. You will be satisfied with my very clear case. If Gray only knew what a martyr I am to the non-indulgence of my weakness for cricket or any other manly English game, I do think even he would look with

a tender eye on this my exceptional game. I must say a word of apology to Mrs. Harcourt, and, relying on your well-known amiability, my dear Kate, to pardon my absence at this particular time, believe me, &c.

“WILLIAM HILL.”

And now we will look over Mrs. Harcourt's shoulder, and read what the vicar says to her.

“DEAR MRS. HARCOURT,—

“What will you say to so ungallant a host? But it is of little use to ask a question that cannot be answered; and so that cannot be what I meant to say. The fact is, I have been led into ‘a match,’ quite unintentionally on my own part, and, between ourselves, I am a little ashamed of my weakness—if weakness it can be called—that takes delight in all manly English sports and sees no harm in them. For, by one of those strange anomalies in human nature, and, in spite of my sense of shame, the anticipation of this ‘match’ seems to gild all my thoughts and actions for the time being with a sort of halo that is pleasurable to

me. And so, if you cannot pardon the 'weakness,' you will not throw a cloud over the halo—will you? Another query—clearly that cannot be what I meant to say. Have you ever been to Teign-ton-pont?—never! Of course never. Moorgarten was at too great a distance—then you know nothing about it, and care less. Excuse me—that is *not* what you mean to say. All ladies who know anything of Devon, or of the society there, wish to go to a 'Ladies' day at Teign-ton-pont.' You will go on Thursday, the 29th, with Mrs. Hill and Charlie—you see I lay my commands upon you. You will look your best—ah!—that certainly is *not* what I meant to say—for you always look so well, it would be impossible to look better. Do not spare my conservatory; flowers of the choicest are yours for the cutting. I wish I was at Lawleigh to cut them for you. No!—that is *not* what I meant to say—because I cannot be one of the 'eleven' and yet be one with you. There is a limit to our pleasures on this earth; the 'eleven' and my 'weakness' for the time being separate me from you. The 'laurels,' when they are won—that is, if I have any hand in the winning—

shall be laid at your feet. Now—I am wondering if that is what I meant to say? I thought when I took up my pen, that I meant to say something—perhaps I did. But it is late. Marvel and Sir Harry wait; and if I had anything to say, I have not time now. You will meet me at Teign-ton-pont, and the ‘match’ will undoubtedly be won either by ‘us’ or the Garrison. If you think the word ‘us’ requires explanation, explain it to your own satisfaction, and I shall be perfectly satisfied. I think I shall make up my mind that you quite forgive my rudeness in leaving you—my conscience has enough to bear at this moment, and if you do not pardon me, my remorse must stand over for some future occasion. Is that what I meant to say? Good night—good night—sleep well—rise well—be well—look well—and believe that

“I am yours, &c., &c.,

“WILLIAM HILL.

“Did I mean to write that?”

CHAPTER II.

IN WHICH PARSON HILL MAKES A SPEECH.

AND the Thursday came. The weather was all that could be desired; the attendance full. If Parson Hill had been a vain man, he might have been a little annoyed that the party from the moor did not arrive earlier on the ground—the more so as he had forewarned them of the long distance and the bad roads, and expressed a wish that they should not be late. But he was far too much absorbed in the game to notice their absence. Teign-ton-pont had met their match! One of the gallant — was as clever at “bowling” as the parson himself; and the good “bowlers” and the capital “bats” on *both* sides, made the battle a hard one to win.

Mrs. Hill and Mrs. Harcourt had not been many minutes on the ground, when a cheer proclaimed that the match was won. And the parson hurried from the field to tell the latter the "laurels" were hers, as he had promised. For Teign-ton-pont had beaten the Garrison.

And now the "elevens" came in by ones and twos and threes, and the ladies clustered together in groups, or promenaded on the green turf, until the announcement of dinner. The president on this occasion was not Sir Walter Pellew of Lacombe, nor Mr. Dunro of Hunsdon, nor Lord Chenstone, nor dear—and, at that time, well known—Henry Mayler. The president may have been a stranger to many, but he was evidently well-known to Parson Hill. The president, when dinner was announced, led the way with Mrs. Hill; Parson Hill followed with Mrs. Harcourt, and soon the large dining-room was full, and the company busy with the good things set before them.

After dinner the usual toasts were given and responded to, and last of all—as is the custom—the president gave, "The Ladies." I am not

able to say that, by any pre-arrangement, Parson Hill rose to reply to this toast. It is certain that he did so.

“Ladies and Gentlemen,—Many years have passed since last I had the honour and the pleasure of standing in your presence. The snows of many winters have added a lustre to my crown; and with years come experience. I am, as you know, a country parson, living on Dartmoor; but neither my locality nor my cloth ever deters me from the heart-felt pleasure of returning thanks for the ladies. In my early life, fate sent me wandering from my native land. In all the cities of Europe—in sunny Constantinople, in quaint Nüremberg, in ancient Prague—I have returned thanks for the ladies. In the Valley of Chamouny, in the Vale of Tempe, and in our own beautiful dove-dale, I have returned thanks for the ladies. On Ehrenbreitstein, on the Righi, on the Rock of Gibraltar, on the Great St. Bernard, and on Mount Parnassus, I have returned thanks for the ladies. On the beautiful lakes of our own country, on Kil-larny, on Como, on the Lagunes of Venice, on the Bay of Naples, and on the Golden Horn, I have

returned thanks for the ladies. On Snowdon, on Ben Lawers, on the Jura, on the Pyrenees, on the Alps, and on the Apennines, I have given thanks for the ladies. But never have I returned thanks for the ladies with more hearty good-will than on the present occasion. (Prolonged applause.) Never have I seen brighter eyes, never more lovely forms, never more charming faces, than meet my gaze at the present moment; and never was my heart more glad in returning thanks for the ladies than at the present time. (Loud cheers.) Ladies," and here the parson paused and looked round, "ladies, we, the Teign-ton-ponters, have this day met a gallant opponent, a fair foe in a fair fight, an honourable company of honourable gentlemen; and if the chances of the game went against them, it was not for want of skill, or want of any of those qualities that together make up the cricketer and the gentleman. We, the Teign-ton-ponters, had hard work to beat them. (Loud and prolonged cheers.) They are no sluggards at their work; they are as gallant a set of gentlemen as it has ever been our good fortune to meet, but, as I said, hard to conquer.

Ladies, bright eyes are dangerous weapons—yours are very bright (cheers) ; smiles are very encouraging—yours are more, they wound while they beckon. (Cheers.) Men who are glorious in fight, have warm hearts for the ladies ; men who are hard to conquer by their fellow-men, succumb to the power of the ladies ; men who are gallant, and noble, and true, are always true to the ladies. Such are the glorious——(Cheers.) Ladies, I have the honour to return thanks in your name, &c., &c.," and Parson Hill seated himself amid a storm of applause.

And then, according to the custom of the meeting, the ladies retired. On these occasions the gentlemen do not remain long at their wine. The festivities of the day always conclude with a dance.

CHAPTER III.

IN WHICH PARSON HILL MEETS MANY OLD FRIENDS.

ON the re-appearance of the gentlemen after dinner, Parson Hill was accosted by a young lady,

“Mr. Hill !—Mr. Hill !” clapping her hands, “I am so glad to see you !”

“I also am glad that I have the power to gladden you,” said the parson, lifting his hat high from his head.

“It is such a long time since I have seen you.”

“Is it indeed ? You have had no loss ; but mine has been great. And you really look so

young, and fresh, and charming—pray, were you ‘out’ when I was here last?”

“Why, I am not ‘out’ now—what nonsense you talk! Do not you know me?”

“The knowledge is on your side—all that I know is that you are a very fascinating young lady; if you are not ‘out,’ the gentlemen have a great loss; and, in my opinion, you ought to come ‘out’ immediately. Is that nonsense?”

“I am afraid mamma would think ‘yes;’ but I think ‘no.’ I should so like to come ‘out,’ but mamma says——”

“Suppose you take my arm,” said Parson Hill, suiting the action to the word; “and then we can have a nice walk and a very cozy talk.”

“Yes, we can,” said the lady, taking his arm. “And I did so beg of mamma to let me come to-day—you see, there was a doubt, because the carriage was so full; but I offered to sit anywhere, or stand, or——”

“I am quite sure you were most amiable.”

“And now I am so glad, because you are here.”

“And I also am glad, as I said before; and certainly your presence adds to my gladness.”

"Oh! You are so funny—you are just as funny as ever. I knew you would be, as soon as ever I saw you. But mamma says I am not to 'come out' until——"

Here the lady stopped, and with a pretty blush looked up at Parson Hill. He stooped his ear to a level with her face, and said,

"Until?"

"It is a secret," said she.

These words appeared to satisfy the parson, for he started to his full height in a moment, as he said,

"I always consider it dangerous to listen to secrets from young ladies. So pray do not tell me!"

"Oh! don't be so stiff," said she, as she tugged at his arm to make him unbend from his erect position.

"Why, I daresay you know all about it."

"You 'daresay' more than I dare."

"Why, has not mamma told you? Because, though it is such a secret, and we are all told not to talk about it, and all that, yet we know mamma tells everybody. She does——"

"And has not told me! Then, of course, I am highly offended. And, most agreeable young lady, if you will take the trouble to understand my uncomfortable position, I think your kind heart will pity me. I do not know your mamma. I do not know you; and I do not know the secret. Now, what do you say to that?"

"Not know me!" said the lady, pulling his arm, and quite ignoring the other two parts of the parson's speech. "Why, I am Lucy! Look at me. Now, don't you see I am Lucy?"

"I see you are very charming."

"Oh, yes! That is just as you used to talk. But you have not been to our house for a very long time. But then, of course, I know you just as well as ever. Why, we used to be such good friends."

And she looked appealingly at him.

"And I hope we are now," said the parson, stopping in his walk, and looking down upon the lady's upturned face.

"Oh, yes? That is, I am sure I am," said she.

"And I am sure I am."

"There is mamma—look! and Isabel, and——"

And the parson and his companion turned to greet some ladies, who were evidently well known to both.

"And so you are the mamma to this charming Lucy?" said Mr. Hill, as he shook hands with the lady.

"I saw her seize hold of you as soon as you left the dining-room," said Mrs. Campbell.

"Pardon me. She is my prisoner," said the parson.

And then the two parties joined, and recommenced their promenade. But this arrangement was not a pleasant one to Lucy. And when, in the pauses of the conversation, Parson Hill turned to speak to her, she said,

"I wish mamma would go away—do not you?"

Parson Hill looked so extremely shocked at this speech, that for the moment the young lady was disconcerted; but rallying almost immediately, she pulled his arm, and said,

"I know you do not mean it."

"Indeed I do," said Parson Hill, *sotto voce*.

And he turned to continue his conversation with Mrs. Campbell.

“I do not believe you,” said Lucy, when she could arrest his attention. “You are only making fun, as you always do.”

“Remember, I am a parson.”

But as, in gatherings of this sort, everybody knows everybody, it follows that everybody must speak to everybody; and thus it happened that Mrs. Campbell was greeted by another party, and Parson Hill was then set free to give all his attention to Lucy.

“There! I am so glad she is gone! Let us get away from the crowd.”

“Miss Lucy Campbell, do you wish to distress the nerves of your aged friend?”

“Aged, indeed! Why, you are not at all old! You are just the very same as ever; and I *am* so glad! But why do you call me ‘miss?’ Don’t you remember you always called me ‘your dear little Lucy.’”

“Did I indeed! What could I have been thinking of, to take such a liberty with you!”

“Why, I liked it very much. And now I am going to ask you something—something that I want you to do. I have quite set my heart on it.”

The parson stopped, and looked down upon the lady.

"Now, you need not make such a face, because I shall not believe you. We all want it so much."

"Not believe me! Am I in my senses?"

"Yes you are. And they made me promise to ask you, as soon as ever they saw you. There was such a clapping of hands in our carriage when Isabel spied you amongst the cricketers! Mamma was quite ashamed!"

"She might well be ashamed!—young ladies clapping their hands at the cricketers! But you say 'they' made you promise to ask me this something. Why did not 'they' ask me themselves?"

"Two or three of them said it would not do for them; but *I* could do it very well. And I was very glad to have to find you out, and ask you to walk with me, and all that!"

"Umph!" said the parson; and then he began to wonder within himself what the lady had set her heart upon, and who were the fair ones whom Lucy designated by "they." "Will you have the kindness to tell me the names of those ladies

who sent you to me? I hope they are not intended to be kept secret?"

"Oh! dear no! There was Isabel, and Charlotte Pitt, and Louisa and Jane Hammond, and a great many more, all the rest of *us*. Of course you know us all?"

"Do I?" said the parson.

"Now do not pretend such nonsense—of course you do! We want to have a day on the moor. We want you to ask our mammas and all of us to come to Lawsleigh for a long, long day."

"Can you not come without being asked?"

"Why, yes; but that will not do at all—we want a real long day, all of us together. When we go without having been asked, we are only two or three; but all together, everybody for a long day—that is what we want."

"Had you not better stay all night?"

The lady was a little disconcerted by this, but again she rallied almost immediately, and said, with such frank *naïveté*, "I never thought of that!" that Parson Hill saw she would have no inclination to refuse such a request, if he made it in earnest.

"Now you expect me to give an answer, and fix the day at once, do you?"

"Of course I do. I expect you to say 'Yes,' and to fix an early day. They all expect it—and they all said you would say 'Yes' to me."

"And so I would," said the parson, "only as you are not out, and therefore cannot come——"

"Indeed I go to all such places!"

"Such places, indeed!" interrupted the parson.

"Yes, all such places. Mamma takes me to pic-nics and water-parties, and archery, and such-like."

"And would she bring you to the moor?"

"She would be delighted! and so would papa—he is so fond of the moor—and Edward, and Herbert, and——"

"Oh!—oh!—oh!" said the parson, affecting to groan.

"Now do not make such a noise," said she, giving his arm a good pull. "You know you like us all very much."

"Do I?" said the parson, in a tone that expressed a doubt.

"Yes. That is, you used to do," and the lady

seemed also to allow some doubt of something to creep into her mind, for she said, in an altered tone: "But if you do not want us to come, why," and then there was a little sigh, as if she inwardly resigned all thought of that charming day on the moor, that had been so vividly pictured by her own bright imagination, "why, I am sure *I* do not want to come; and they will not; and I shall go and tell them," and she drew her arm from Parson Hill, "that you are quite altered, and do not care for us one bit!"

"Oh! Lucy! Lucy! and are you then going to leave me?"

"Why, you do not want me; you are quite changed!"

"Then you have changed me!"

"I! What have I done?"

"Have you not told me that you—you, my dear little Lucy," and the parson turned up his eyes despairingly, "that you do not want to come?"

"Well, that is because you are so strange; but really, I *do* want to come very much!"

"Then why did you tell such a falsehood, Lucy?" said Parson Hill, as he once more re-

placed her arm within his own. "And to a parson, of all people in the world!"

"Don't talk nonsense! You know I *do* want to come and see you; and they all want to come; and I only said that because I was proud!"

"Then people who are proud are allowed to tell falsehoods, are they?"

"Oh! do not trouble me about that, but just go on with what we have been talking about."

"And you are sure you may come, though you are not out?"

"Yes, yes, of course, I go to all such places. But I have to wait a whole year after that is all over, about Isabel and Colonel Ramsden, and so I shall not be out for a long time yet; but that will make no difference."

"Who are those young ladies standing in a group to the right?"

"Why, all the very people!—all the Hammonds, and Charlotte Pitt, and the Stones, and all your old friends!"

"All my old friends? Then why do they not come and speak to me?"

"Why, I told you they sent me, because they

said you would be sure to say 'yes,' if I asked you."

"Then if I take courage, and walk up to them, do you think they will speak to me?"

"They will be delighted," said the lady, eagerly; "and you will be sure to tell them we may have our day."

"No," said the parson, shaking his head.

"No!—oh!—do you really mean that?" said she, earnestly.

"I commission you, my dear little Lucy, to invite your young friends to Lawsleigh Vicarage for this day fortnight. And now let us turn off at this side walk, just to make our arrangements for the grand day—we must have something to amuse so many people—shall we have dominoes?"

"Dominoes!—good gracious!—why, we want to be out of doors all day!"

"Ah! then hockey is the game—only mind the bogs."

"Nonsense—only boys play hockey. We will have croquet."

"Croquet!" said the parson; "and, pray, what is croquet?"

"Why, do not you know croquet?—why, everybody knows croquet quite well; and it would be so nice on the moor."

"Is it a sweet cake?"

"I tell you, it is a game like hockey."

"Well, then, if it is like hockey, why will not hockey do?—because I do not know the one, and I am well versed in the other."

"Oh! nonsense, we shall never get on in this way—and, there—now do not you hear the band?"

"Ah! and as my dancing days are over, I am ashamed to have appropriated my little Lucy all this time, and so caused her to lose the first dance."

"I should not care if I had, because I am with you. But they are not dancing yet; do not you see the groups of ladies still standing about?—they will all be gone as soon as the first dance is called. And you will promise me that we shall all go to the moor this day fortnight?"

"Yes, I promise. But may I get up a cricket-match for the gentlemen, as well as hockey for the ladies? Remember, the party is yours—you are to be the queen of the day."

"Oh! delightful!—charming!—do you really mean it?"

"I really mean it."

"Oh! most surprising!—and how I *do* hope mamma will let me. Queen of the day!—beautiful!"

"Do you think she will refuse any request of mine?" said Parson Hill, with a serious face.

"Oh! no—I am sure she will not."

"Then we will have a cricket-match and hockey; and I'll ask the Garrison, and the Teign——"

"No!" said Lucy, in her naive surprise.

"Ah, you object to the presence of so many gentlemen?"

"No, no, no; I am out of my wits with joy—ask them all, everyone. The only mistake is, the hockey—we will have croquet; and do make them all come."

"Then does croquet mean people?"

"We will do *without* croquet," said she, vehemently; "so, now, do not trouble any more about that. But I assure you everybody knows and everybody plays the game of croquet."

“Game! Then if everybody plays, of course, as you say, we will have it—there is plenty of room on the moor.”

By this time they were near to a group of ladies standing together conversing; and Lucy exclaimed,

“You are all to go with me to the moor; and all the Garrison; and all Teign-ton-pont, and mamma, and everybody—oh! I *am* so pleased!”

Parson Hill drew himself up to his full height, raised his hat high above his head, and stood silent; while Lucy volubly and delightedly explained the success of her application.

Charlie came up to claim his partner, for the first quadrille was forming; and Mr. Hill took the opportunity of saying to him,

“When you are at liberty from the dance, just make a list of those friends of ours who are here to-day.”

And when Lucy was claimed for the dance, the vicar made arrangements with the Garrison and the Club to meet at Lawsleigh that day fortnight. It is almost unnecessary to add that all the mammas of all the young ladies gave a willing assent to Parson Hill's invitation.

CHAPTER IV.

THE DOG WITH AN ILL NAME.

THE sun had risen on Lawsleigh long before Isaac Watson gave up his walk to and fro between the school cottage and the smithy. And when at length he thought he had done as much as one unassisted man could do at one time, he prepared himself for a little rest, previously to the commencement of the toils of a new day. He went softly into his bedroom, afraid of disturbing Mary, if she were asleep: yet half-longing she might be awake, that he might tell her of the progress he had made; but, to all appearance, Mary slept.

"How tired she looks," said Isaac to himself; "and I do think the pillow is wetted with her

tears—poor thing! she frets about losing the school.” And with a heavy sigh at Mary’s vexation, Isaac put his head on the pillow, and, worn out with toil and anxiety, closed his eyes in sleep.

As soon as the steady rise and fall of his respiration proved that he was oblivious of all worldly cares, Mary raised up her head, and, bending over, looked at him as she said to herself,

“I declare his face is as good and calm in its expression as if he had not broken his word. And how he has worked through this weary night!—that is, weary to me,” continued she, for she had not slept, “because my heart is so full of trouble.”

Mary now sat up in bed; the sun’s rays streamed brightly in at the window. They were gradually creeping over the bed from the head downwards. Mary turned again to look at Isaac as he lay in all his unconscious manliness and strength; his head without any covering, except the dark curls that clustered so thickly over it, and on the crown of which the sun’s beam rested, throwing, as it were, for a minute or two, a halo over him while sleeping.

“Ah! how I love him!” said Mary, as the tears

unbidden rolled down her cheeks. "He looks so good; nay, he *is* so good—no one, not even Parson Hill can deny that. He is good; good to me and to his mother, and to everybody, except himself, and—well! I never! But the sun does make him look handsome," continued she, as she gazed upon him. "I might say blessed; yes, blessed with that light playing round his head! And yet here I sit crying my eyes out, because—oh! what shall I do?—what will become of me? and I do love him so!"

And with a passionate burst of weeping, stifling her sobs as best she could, for fear of awaking Isaac, Mary once more put her head on the pillow, and tried to sleep.

Vain attempt! The shock had been too great for her physical strength. She had not the power of forgetfulness—that great boon to the weary-hearted. Isaac had broken his word. This one idea haunted her. She did not attempt to find excuses for him in his fault, or for herself in having too easily credited his honeyed words, and too willingly placed herself in her present position. All

she said, and thought, was—"Isaac has broken his word."

But the morrow came, or rather, in this case, the hour for rising, in spite of the wretchedness of the night. Isaac still slept.

There was, to Mary's thinking, something strange in the repose of the smithy cottage this morning, as distinguished from others; for in these few short days of her early married life, she had become so accustomed to the stirring sounds of a smith at work, while she was dressing, she could hardly understand or appreciate the silence of the present moments.

"I must hide my trouble from poor mother," said Mary. "Ay, from everybody; from him; and I wish I could forget it myself."

And she bathed her face and eyes with cold spring water.

"I must try to look just my ow-nself." And again she attempted to remove the traces of tears from her eyes. "And I must pray to God for strength to bear what His will imposes upon me."

And now Mary began to feel a little more calm, and a little better able to sustain her part, as she

had suggested to herself, and she went down to breakfast.

"The lad be a-weary after a-working all night," said the widow to Mary, as she made her appearance downstairs.

"He does seem very tired, mother—dear Isaac," said Mary, recalling him to her mind's eye, as he lay with the sun's beams playing round his head.

"Ay, lass, him be worth thy trouble ; for trouble I can see thee hast got a-losing of the school."

And so, fortunately for Mary, both the Widow Simpson and Isaac thought she fretted for the loss of the school ; and Mary, ingenuous even in her thoughts, said to herself,

"And so I should have fretted for the school if I had not had some weightier burden on my mind," and she sighed heavily as she remembered Parson Hill's words, "that in less than a month—ay, she would not have been married a week before Isaac would go to the 'Packhorse' again."

But, at length, Isaac made his appearance, and, in his hearty way, acknowledged "he had been

very lazy that morning; he could not but feel ashamed at sleeping so long."

To a man accustomed to rise with the sun, it does appear "lazy" to remain in bed till eight A.M., whatever may have overruled the change of hour; and Isaac spoke, in the simplicity of his heart, the actual feeling of the moment. But now Mary's thoughts took a bitter turn, for she said to herself,

"If he had only that to feel ashamed of, how proud I should be of him—but I see now, I am not to be proud and happy, and think I have the handsomest and best husband in the world, though I did think so yesterday, and all my sorrow for the loss of the school—and it was real and great—could not take away the proud happiness about my heart."

And yet, though she suffered such thoughts to destroy her peace of mind—for she felt perfectly assured that Isaac had been drinking at the 'Pack-horse'—yet, by a strange sort of perversity, she never turned her eyes upon him without being charmed with his frank and ardent manner, eager to anticipate her lightest wish, and always putting

his hand to any kind of help either she or the good Widow Simpson required.

But Isaac went on with his daily work, and Mary tried to stow out of the way as many of her newly arrived treasures as she could. For, about ten o'clock, the bright morning had suddenly clouded over, and a heavy shower fell, and, as Isaac had not been particular in placing the goods under cover—indeed he had not space for them—they were in danger of being a good deal defaced.

While Mary and the old woman busied themselves by carrying into the cottage such articles as they could lift, Isaac set off to the nearest farm to borrow a tarpaulin. He failed in his first attempt, but, not suspecting his neighbour of incivility, he was hastily going off to another, when the farmer himself appeared and prevented him by saying,

“Isaac, thee would get a tarpauler down there to the Vickridge—eh! Isaac?—haw, haw, haw! The passon may be would lend thee one—eh! Isaac? Ax the passon to lend thee a cover for thy wife’s fine bonnet—the passon be uncommon kind to thee, lad!”

The man continued his jeers, but Isaac now

turned away home. Never in his life had he felt more angry. To think that the very man who, only one short week ago, would have been proud and pleased to do him any kindness, should now not only refuse his neighbourly assistance in a time of difficulty, but should actually insult him, first with the loss of the parson's favour, and then with the manner in which his wife chose to dress. But he did not reply to the man's abuse, only this conduct from one neighbour influenced Isaac not to ask from another what might a second time produce jeers at his change of position, instead of lending him the required help.

And so Isaac then gave his assistance to the two women, and removed the heavier articles under cover, which had filled up his shed, so as to preclude the possibility of receiving even one horse for its shoes, to say nothing of the teams crossing the moor that might at any moment require his attention.

About twelve the rain ceased, and the sun shone again, but the appearance of the clouds driving heavily before the wind seemed to threaten more wet ere the day was over.

"Mary, dear," said Isaac, as he fetched his hat, "I'll just go to the cottage while it holds up, and take Jem with me"—one of his men at work in the back shop—"and remove the drawers while the sun shines. You see, my dear, we packed them in fine weather, and did not forecast for storms, so now I will be off and get them in dry, if I can."

And so Isaac set off, attended by Jem; and together they managed to bring home the drawers before another shower prevented their going again to the cottage; and when that valued piece of furniture was safe, Isaac came in with a face radiant with good-humour, contentment, and love, and, rushing up to Mary, exhibited to her delighted eyes a large bouquet of choice flowers.

"Goodness me, Isaac!—what lovely flowers! Where did you get them?"

"Guess!" said the delighted Isaac, holding them high up, out of her reach.

"It be the passon, lad!—the cheery passon!" said the widow. "I knowed him was only making believe to be hard on you; the passon has a-got a kind heart; him be the man as have sended them posies!"

"Nay, nay, mother," said Isaac, "it is not the parson," as, with a heavy sigh, he gave the flowers to Mary, and stooping, kissed her tenderly. "When I passed the vicarage garden, Mary, the two ladies were there—Master Charlie's wife, and the other lady—and they stopped me, and asked how you were—and they asked for you, mother—and I gave them many thanks for the nice basket of fruit that James Marvel brought you from the vicar. And when I was returning, there they were again at the garden wall. And they called to me, and said they had gathered those flowers for you, Mary, and they hoped you would like them. So kind of them, my dear, was it not?"

"Oh! yes, Isaac, they are very kind, they are two such nice ladies, you cannot think how kind they were to me on my journey from town. They seemed to think—though they did not say so—to think that I was innocent of the things Mr. Gray had told them about me; and so I was, you know!"

"Quite innocent, Mary. And *I* like those ladies, my dear, as much as you do. They are very pleasant in their manner to me at all times;

for in my walks to and fro to your cottage, before we married, I have often chanced to see them, and they had always the same kind, smiling, and encouraging manner ; so that I could lift up my head and speak to them heartily ! And I used to walk away happy, my dear, and say to myself, ‘ I feel as if those ladies thought well of me ! ’ And to my dying hour,” said Isaac, after a little pause, “ I shall be grateful to those ladies for their treatment of you—for thinking you innocent until you could be proved guilty. ‘ Give a dog an ill name,’ says the proverb. And I am myself a living proof of the truth of that saying. For I fear the ill name that I have given to myself by my former deeds,”—oh ! why did Mary think at this moment of Isaac’s broken promise ?—“ will be a long time ere it leaves me, though I am now an altered man, for which I devoutly thank my Maker ! ”

And as, in his kind and tender way, he turned to caress Mary, she hid her face upon his shoulder.

CHAPTER V.

IN WHICH ISAAC WATSON ENJOYS HIS PIPE, AND
TASTES COFFEE FOR THE FIRST TIME.

THE troubles at the smithy seemed to increase instead of lessen. The goods from the cottage were all removed in the given time, but there was great difficulty in finding room for them. Most of the cottages on that part of Dartmoor were built of stone, but the smithy cottage erected, by Isaac's forefathers, was of granite, and though so small and poor in comparison with less remote dwellings, was a model of sturdiness and strength. The one large room on the ground floor ran from back to front, and opened at the side into Isaac's shed. The two rooms above—that is, the space of the large room divided into two for bed-rooms—

with some small offices on the ground floor, together made all the accommodation there was. These three rooms were better filled with furniture than any other in the village, excepting only the school-cottage, which, as we have said, was fitted up with a certain degree of luxury for Mary's use.

Until Isaac could build additional rooms, it was very inconvenient to bring in many articles, and almost impossible to find room for them. For a day or two all kinds of annoyances accrued from this influx of heavy material, that could not by any amount of art be pressed into a small compass; and, to add to their troubles, the weather continued wet, and had become cold. Isaac's shed was full of packages, and men, bringing their horses to be shod, grumbled that both themselves and their horses must stand in the rain. It was plain something must be done. Isaac had wasted many hours of valuable time in trying to engage masons to commence at once the addition he contemplated making to his cottage, and had failed. Mary behaved well. She did not complain that the goods were getting wetted or defaced, or that they were inconveniently placed, so that the articles they

contained were useless to her ; she saw Isaac did all he could. And in her present state of mind, she would not have cared much if all her valued furniture had been set fire to in the middle of the moor, and burnt to ashes, so long as Isaac had only been true to his word, and never entered that "Packhorse" again.

A great sorrow absorbs the mind, and takes away our desire for earthly grandeur and earthly possessions ; and Mary's grief at Isaac's succumbing to temptation was very great and very absorbing.

In the course of a day or two, when the wind was less boisterous, and the rain had somewhat ceased, Isaac set about building a temporary shed of wood, that should be weather-proof, behind the cottage, and in a corner of the garden. It is true it was very inconvenient to have a shed there, and it is also true that, in the limited space at his command, he could never place it conveniently, and then there must be some destruction of garden produce ; so that, all things considered, the influx of Mary's wealth seemed to impoverish Isaac rather than to enrich him ; but if he did now and

then heave a deep sigh over his work, and now and then shake his head, as he destroyed in the garden more than he had at first anticipated, he did not add to Mary's troubles by telling her of his own.

It was of first-rate importance to stow somewhere out of the way the many packages that encumbered his shed, for they prevented the men and horses from having their customary shelter in stormy weather. When Isaac set to work, he did not let the grass grow under his feet, and so, to use his own words, "he knocked up the shed, roughly enough, in no time," and then carried in as much as he could without more help,—promising to himself to complete his work early on the morrow, with the assistance of one of his men—but he managed to clear a good space in his own shed. It was late at night before he had finished, for the showers came on occasionally, and proved a great hindrance; but he gave up work at length and entered the cottage, saying, in his hearty tones,

"My dear, was I not fortunate? I had got all the best of the things safe before the last shower

came, and now the place is snug and tight, and they cannot take any harm."

"But you seem so wet, Isaac," said Mary, gently.

"That is nothing, my dear," said he.

And he gave himself a shake, and sprinkled Mary all over with the wet from his clothes; but as he did not see the effect of his own action, Mary said nothing.

"The nice fire is very comfortable, my dear," said he, as he seated himself on the settle in the corner. "I shall soon be dry now I have taken off my waistcoat; and I think it so kind of you, my dear, to sit up all by yourself, and it is so very late."

And Isaac looked at the large clock that was ticking loudly, and pointing out the hour.

"Why, you have been working so hard, Isaac, and I am sure I am always very glad to sit up for you; and I made you some nice coffee—at least, I think it nice," said Mary, correcting herself. "I thought perhaps you would like it with your pipe," added she, timidly, for she could not forget his taste for cider.

"It smells very nice, my dear," said Isaac, who

was not accustomed to anything but tea; but this coffee had been brought from the school-cottage amongst Mary's stores.

She poured out a cup, and put milk and sugar in Isaac's reach; and when he had tasted it, he declared there never was anything in the world that could be nicer.

"Why, Mary dear, cider is nothing to it!" said Isaac.

"I am glad you like it better than cider," said she, feeling her heart bound as if she now saw some light through the darkness that appeared to envelope her.

"Better! why, there is no comparison; it is most delicious, and so warm and comforting after being so wet. Thank thee, my dear Mary, and God bless thee!" added he, softly, as he placed his hand on her head.

"You know, Isaac, all the gentlemen at the vicarage have coffee when they smoke—never cider," said Mary, in sweet low tones, that fell pleasantly on Isaac's ear.

"Indeed, my dear! They know what is good!" said he, shaking his head and laughing.

"Why, many a time I have seen them with their pipes and cigars on the lawn, all among the flowers, and the men-servants handing them coffee, and little tiny tables set about here and there, and some gentlemen walking about, and some sitting down, and all talking and laughing together so happily, and perhaps some ladies at the drawing-room windows, and some gentlemen standing talking with them."

"Well, really, my dear, that must have been a very attractive sort of scene. I know that beautiful vicarage lawn well," said Isaac, trying to stifle a sigh; "and I am sure the gentlemen must enjoy their pipes and their cigars there, all among the flowers, and the handsome ladies looking at them and talking to them. And then this coffee! Mary, I hope the gentlemen like their coffee as well as I do mine."

And Isaac drank off a large cup of coffee as if it had been a pint of cider.

"You see, Isaac, I often used to go to the vicarage summer evenings—perhaps between eight and nine o'clock—to fetch some books, or anything else Parson Hill had given me; and so

then it was I used to see the gentlemen have pipes and coffee on the lawn."

"Yes, my dear, he was always a kind man, was the parson, and always trying to do good. He has lent me a great many books in my time. I am very grateful to him."

And Isaac sighed heavily as he thought of the loss he had in the parson's notice.

"And I could make you coffee any time you like, Isaac," said Mary, inwardly hoping Isaac would say—"Always, instead of cider;" but he only said—"To be sure, my dear;" and replacing his pipe in his mouth puffed quietly; while Mary turned away her face to hide her disappointment, and a silence fell upon them for the space of a minute or two. At length Isaac spoke.

"Is that the coffee kettle standing there on the turf?"

"It is the coffee-pot, Isaac."

"Oh! ay. I see it is quite a different shape from the tea-kettle. And so that is the coffee-pot?—and I am sure it has made some very nice coffee for me to-night. And I *do* like coffee," added he, kindly, for her silence had not escaped his notice.

“And I hope to live to bless the day that first made us man and wife. And this day also, Mary, that you first made for me such delicious coffee.”

And then Isaac took his pipe from his mouth, and put his arm round Mary and drew her nearer to him, for he saw the tear trembling in her eye, though he had no thought of the great sorrow that saddened all Mary's thoughts; and said in a gentle tone, as if he wished to comfort her,

“And, my dear, in spite of our present annoyances, we must bear up with courage. ‘It is a long lane that has no turn.’”

Mary cast down her eyes, and did not speak. Whenever Isaac referred hopefully to their future career, she recalled his broken vow. But he, fancying her mind was running on the loss of the school, and her goods still in such jeopardy, said,

“And, my dear, we must have patience. I will get everything right for you as soon as I can. And I do not think the furniture will suffer any harm in the long run; for when the new rooms are built, I will polish up the tables and chairs,

and get them all in order before they are put into use."

"Oh! I am sure you are always most kind, Isaac," said Mary, as the tear overflowed its boundary, and rolled down her cheek; for she understood that he had misread her silence.

"And I had need be ashamed if I was not kind, Mary. And, my dear, never in my life have I relished my pipe as I do to-night. It is all the coffee—most delicious it is."

And Isaac tossed off another large cup of the wonderful beverage at a mouthful.

Mary's heart again swelled with hope, and Isaac said,

"I declare, Mary, I might be a king!—that is, for my enjoyment of my pipe, and the coffee, and with you, my dear—God bless you!—by my side!"

And he pressed her tenderly to his heart.

Isaac forgot that the toil he had undergone made rest enjoyable and refreshment welcome; and though we by no means wish to do away with the propriety of Mary's forethought in providing the coffee, we feel it is just an even chance

that, if it had been produced under less favourable auspices, it might not have been so highly relished.

CHAPTER VI.

WHICH TREATS OF THE OLD SIMPSONSES BIBLE.

THE Widow Simpson had always been what was called on the moor a “deft-handed” woman, that is, clever with her needle, or at knitting, or at household work. We might describe her as a thorough housewife, without an atom of the so-called “book-learning” that distinguished Isaac from his contemporaries.

Until Isaac grew up to manhood, she used no book but the Bible. Indeed books of any kind were great rarities on the moor. And even when Isaac was able to offer to her amusing or instructive books, they were no pleasure to her. Works on religious subjects she preferred ; but curiously

enough she always told Isaac she was no wiser at the end than she was at the beginning.

When Mary's store of books was added to Isaac's, the old woman was greatly astonished at their number, the beauty of the binding of some, the number of "picters" in others.

Parson Hill always sent Mary the "Leisure Hour," and these numbers were afterwards bound. The "Family Friend" was a luxury Mary had hitherto been able to allow herself, because, as she said to the widow,

"It is so useful; there are so many good patterns, and the stories are so pretty."

And now the widow seemed in a fair way to become learned in her old age. She repeatedly put aside her knitting to look at the "many picters in Mary's books." And when Mary explained the meaning of the "picters," her astonishment was very great. In her childhood she had never heard half so many wonderful tales as Mary told her now. For with great good-nature, Mary would sit by the old woman, and, without reading the whole story aloud, give a synopsis of the principal events, that very much gratified her hearer.

Then the old woman told Mary that

"Isaac's books be that hard as I could never make nothing out of them. And yet, Mary, the lad has a-ried to find a book as I should like."

"I am sure he would, mother; he is so kind."

"There be the old Simpsonses Bible, Mary dear. I have a-readed in that ever since I was but a little one."

"Yes, mother. This, I suppose," said Mary, pointing to one on the side table, a quarto edition in two volumes, and an excellent print, "that I see you use every day?"

"Oh, no! That be the one Isaac gived I."

Mary, on examining the book, saw that she had spoken without reflexion. It had been published by the "Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge," long since the Widow Simpson was a girl.

"Us must have the large old Simpsonses Bible bringed down off the shelf, Mary."

But it was beyond Mary's reach, and, moreover, very heavy, and Isaac was called in to assist.

"And now, lad, as thee has got the book down, I must have the lines put in, about thee and Mary."

Mary did not understand ; but she quickly fetched pen and ink ; and then, under the records of former generations, she saw Isaac write, in his bold, clear, and clerkly hand :

“Isaac Watson married Mary Cope, &c., &c.”

And after the little scene that followed the writing of the lines was over—Isaac gently caressing Mary, and the old woman giving them her blessing—Mary took the opportunity of examining “the large old Simpsons Bible,” and confessed to herself she had never, except only in church, seen one of such a size and beauty as this. It was bound in white calf, but not ornamented. The simple initials I. S. were on the cover. But in the midst of her admiration at the large size of the book, at its clear type, and its excellent state of preservation, she was not much surprised to hear that the old woman did not like the Bible Isaac had given her half so well.

“No, mother dear, it is not so large nor so handsome,” said Mary ; “but then it is more comfortable to use every day, and saves this large one for years and years to come.”

“Ay, lass ; but I never think of saving the

Bible. Coz why, Mary, Bibles always lasts peoples lives, and the lives of their children."

"Yes; such a magnificent Bible as this would of course last many generations, and especially with this strong leather cover to slip on and off."

"But, Mary, why for do they call Adamases and Eveses breeches 'aprons' in this new Bible?"

"I do not know what you mean, mother," said Mary.

"Why, Mary dear, in the 'large old Simpsons Bible,' the first man, that be Adam, and the first woman, that be Eve, the mother of all the living creatures," continued the old woman to Mary's mute astonishment, "when they seed as they was naked they made theirselves 'breeches' to cover theirselves, as was but right."

"Oh, no, mother," said Mary; "you have forgotten. I can show you the passage," and she turned to open the large Bible.

"And in that 'large old Simpsons Bible' they have a-got 'breeches,' I knows," said the old woman, in a positive tone.

Mary, if she had spoken, would have said she never was so "taken aback" in her life! She

actually rubbed her eyes, as if the fault, if fault it was, lay there. Then she compared the two editions, and understood what had before seemed strange in the old woman's query.

Isaac entered the room at this moment, and the old woman explained to him—

“Mary be quite so much 'stonished as I be to that there new Bible.”

Isaac turned with a smile to Mary, for he comprehended at once that her wonder would be at the old edition, and that she was only familiar with the new. And Mary confessed,

“I never have seen a Bible with that passage printed otherwise than, ‘They took fig leaves and sewed them together and made themselves aprons.’”

And if Isaac had not been a little more reflective than his two companions, and if he had not had a clearer understanding of how the precious book was at length “done into English,” Mary might have thought that “the old Simpsons” were queer people, for even their “large old Simpsons Bible” was totally different from all other Bibles.

But while we relate some of the incidents occurring in Mary's married life, we must not forget

that our second "heroine"—if she deserves that title—is not yet married, and that we must advance her history in some degree.

"And so you two will sit and stitch in a morning in spite of all my arguments to the contrary," said Parson Hill, coming up to the open drawing-room window where Mrs. Harcourt and Mrs. Hill sat at work.

"Indeed we are not wedded to our work," said Mrs. Hill.

"I am heartily glad to hear it; I should not approve of such a strange 'wedding,'" said he.

"You would like Mrs. Harcourt to be better 'wedded,' and to have a better 'wedding,'" said Mrs. Hill, laughing mischievously.

"I should like her to be better mated, if you mean that," said Mr. Hill; "the song says, 'for men must work'—why then should a woman be 'wedded' to work?"

And then, without waiting for an answer to his question, he turned to Mrs. Harcourt, and said,

"Will you not come out and breathe this fine air? I declare I feel as lonely as—as the man

in the moon when the earth is enveloped in fog, and he sees and feels himself the only living soul ; and as, at such times, he cannot wile away his time by looking down upon us, so I——”

“ You want your playfellow in point of fact,” said Mrs. Hill.

“ I desire companionship.”

Mrs. Harcourt left the room.

“ I know you do, and it will be your own fault if you are left without it,” said she, playfully.

“ Will not Mrs. Harcourt come out ?”

“ Yes ; she is gone for her hat and mantle—at least, I interpret her absence thus favourably for you.”

“ And you—are you too intent on those stitches to give them up for——”

“ I am waiting till Charlie comes from the stables. I am afraid I must ask you to excuse me. Charlie says Sir Aston has a bad cough, and——”

“ There is always something the matter with Charlie’s horses. They are too highly fed.”

“ Oh ! no—that cannot be ; Duchess never ails anything.”

“Ah! she wishes to prove herself an exception to the rest of her sex.”

At this moment Mrs. Harcourt entered the room, equipped for walking.

“Then you will take pity on my loneliness?” said Parson Hill to Mrs. Harcourt, and they went out together.

Soon afterwards, Charlie entered the drawing-room.

“How is Sir Aston?” said Mrs. Hill.

“He will do very well, I daresay,” said Charlie; “at all events, a little exercise will do him good. At what hour will you ride?”

“We must ask Mrs. Harcourt.”

“That is the vicar’s business,” said Charlie.

“They are walking together,” said she.

“Look, look, Kate!” said Charlie.

Mrs. Hill turned her eyes upon the lawn, and saw Mrs. Harcourt with a magnificent magnolia in her hand, and Mr. Hill standing by her side gathering a second

“Now, do look, Kate! And so we see he will gather his splendid flowers for her, and yet he has hitherto treasured them like gold—nay, I do think

"I am sure I have never seen him since that time."

"They are as good as dead in this locality, and he has taken such pains to give them comfort and shelter."

"Look, Kate!"

The wind blew the last scattered flower over Mrs. Hayward's hat and swept her down and talking to her.

"Yes, Charlie, yes; it must come to something—they cannot go on in that way and mean nothing."

"Does she still try to throw dust in your eyes?"

"No, no; I cannot accuse her of a wish to mystify. She is too retiring, and, I should say, does not give enough encouragement to Mr. Hill. She always looks as if she did not believe his compliments."

"Oh! Kate, Kate, do not try to cram me in that way. Fancy the governor wanting encouragement at his time of life!"

"Well, Charlie, what else can it be? Surely he has had ample time to propose!"

"He has surely given her his most devoted admiration and attention ; and why he does not, or has not proposed, is a mystery to me. But look again, Kate."

Mrs. Harcourt had taken off her hat, and was placing a magnolia in it. When she replaced the hat, the vicar slightly altered the fall of the flower, and then they again walked on together.

"I never knew him so slow at settling anything," said Charlie ; "and yet I can see no room to doubt what the end will be, unless the widow is coquetting, and already prepared to say 'No,' when he makes his speech."

"She is no coquette, I am sure," said Mrs. Hill.

"Humph! I will not say as much for any woman."

"You are rude, Charlie."

"Sorry for it, my dear ; truth is not always palatable."

CHAPTER VII.

WHICH TREATS OF THE FATE AWAITING THE
LAWSLEIGH ELEVEN, AND OF THE DESPAIR OF
MASTER CHARLIE.

BUT the day for the fête was approaching. The weather was now fine; and as in out-of-door amusements the weather is of the first importance, so the present agreeable change was pleasant to all.

A few days before the great event, Charlie joined his wife on the lawn at Lawsleigh Vicarage, and drawing her arm within his own, said,

“Oh ! Kitty, Kitty.”

Mrs. Hill looked up smilingly, but did not speak.

"Kitty, Kitty, my darling," said Charlie, pressing her hand, and looking down upon her.

"I do not like to be called Kitty," said she.

"Well, then, Katy—will that please you?"

"No; I do not like Katy."

"Sheer nonsense!" said Charlie, impatiently.

"Ah! no, Charlie—it is a very sensible dislike of mine."

"I have often heard of a 'foolish' dislike to this or that, never of a sensible one—so pray explain."

"You only call me Kitty or Katy when you have something unpleasant to say, or when you are uncomfortable in some way, and so trying to hide your discomfort from me."

"Most clever Kate!—you are a 'cheese'—indeed, you are a first-rate 'cheese.' You have hit the right nail on the head."

"Ah! I knew you were full of care—open your heart, and let me know the worst."

"The dear old governor!"

Mrs. Hill looked up wonderingly.

"The door old governor is in a terrible scrape."

"Scrape, Charlie?"

"Scrape, Kate."

"Then do tell me what about? When he set off for a ride with Mrs. Harcourt, about half an hour ago, he looked happy enough."

"He is always happy when he is with her; but I assure you he is in a fix."

"If you would but tell me, Charlie?"

"I am here on purpose to tell you. It is about this gathering at Lawsleigh."

"What, the party on the 15th? How can that be any annoyance to Mr. Hill? There is nothing he more enjoys than a large influx of his personal friends."

"He will not like to be well 'thrashed;' and that will be his fate on Thursday."

Mrs. Hill looked at Charlie inquiringly.

"Isaac for a 'bat,' and the governor for a 'ball,' and the Lawsleigh eleven stand a fair chance of beating all comers. But just fancy the dear old governor without Isaac—I cannot bear the thought."

"Then why cannot Isaac come?—I thought Mr. Hill and Mr. Gray had arranged that all the villagers should have a share of the enjoyment."

"Yes, that is one of the governor's old-fashioned ways. He never has any really grand fête without regaling the whole village. Bells ringing, flags flying, choir singing, everybody happy. And there again, Kate, the bells! Isaac is such a famous ringer! Bless my heart, my care is heavier than I thought! I am in despair."

And Charlie seated himself disconsolately on a garden chair.

"But how can Mr. Hill ask the whole village, and not ask Isaac and his wife?"

"His wife! What! that wicked schoolmistress, who preferred a husband to the governor's friendship! Kitty, Kitty, that will never do."

"But do you mean to say, Charlie, that Mr. Hill can or will ask all the people in the village, and omit only those two—Isaac, the handsome smith, and Mary, his pretty wife?"

"I think the handsome smith and the pretty wife would soon be ordered out of the governor's presence if they were to show their 'pretty' 'handsome' faces on his lawn! But they are too discreet for that."

"Oh, Charlie! Mr. Hill will never be at enmity

with his parishioners—he will live in peace with all.”

“‘Mr. Hill’ will not encourage self-willed schoolmistresses—it is all against the parson’s province to allow such people to have wills of their own; and then he had been so particularly kind, and gracious, and encouraging to this particular schoolmistress, that he ought to feel the more angry, though I am not prepared to say that he does. Neither, Kate, will he encourage clever-tongued drunkards in their expertness in carrying off said self-willed schoolmistresses; and to ask Isaac and Mary here so soon after they had been known ‘to fly in the parson’s face,’ would be doing both.”

“This is terrible, Charlie!”

“It is terrible, and I may well be in trouble and come to you for sympathy and comfort. Kitty, Kitty, I tell you the Lawsleigh eleven will be ‘batted out’ and ‘bowled over’ like ninepins!”

“I do not mean terrible on that head, Charlie.”

“But I do. And pray on what other head would you have the governor beaten?”

“I do not want Mr. Hill to be beaten; but I

am thinking of Isaac and Mary, Charlie; poor things, it seems to me so cruel to leave them out of the fête."

"Why, I am sure the governor will be just as unhappy as Isaac and Mary, though from a very different cause. He must as a principle stand aloof from them at present, but I know it grieves him to do so. But what must be, must. They have—"

"But, Charlie dear, they had a right to marry if they wished."

"Ah, my dear Kate, do not run away with the wrong end of the rope. We know they had a right to marry; but Mary was wrong to marry in the governor's absence for one thing, and to marry a man of such a character as Isaac's for another. The dear old governor is not unreasonable, Kate; and if Isaac had taken his flattering tongue to the vicar, and asked permission to marry Mary, after he had proved himself reformed, I am sure the governor would have given him the chance. But Isaac has been wrong through all the business. He is usually very straightforward, and thoroughly to be depended upon; but in this case the governor

has been hoodwinked—whether intentionally or not, I cannot say. Certain it is, he thought Isaac was making love to that pretty milliner girl who came on a visit to Mary a few months ago, and all the while he was, as the villagers say, ‘a-keeping company with Mistress Cope.’”

“I declare, Charlie, I am quite unhappy about Isaac and Mary, and Mr. Hill and you, dear!”

“Your unhappiness does you credit, my love!” said Charlie, as he put his arm round his wife’s waist and drew her closer to him. And then he resumed,

“Isaac has always been such an open-hearted, honest fellow; he has always had so many good qualities as a set-off to his one well-known vice, that when he marries in this foolish way, one feels fairly lifted off the hinges! If he had gone to the governor in his manly honesty and stated his case—if he had asked the governor to fix a time for his probation or reformation—if he had asked the governor to give him ‘the hope’—only ‘the hope,’ that his own continued good conduct should secure to him the hand of Mary Cope, the dear old governor would have been a firm friend and judicious

adviser to both! I cannot understand that upright Isaac Watson condescending to steal his wife as he has done!"

"Perhaps he did not like to wait a long, long time, as Mr. Hill might have required him to do."

"I can quite appreciate and agree with your remark, my love."

"But now, Charlie, dear, I cannot see how Mr. Hill can avoid asking Isaac and Mary when he asks the whole village of Lawsleigh—of course they must be included in that wholesale invitation; and then, of course, they would come——"

"Ah! you fancy the governor sends cards round, do you?"

The Vicar of Lawsleigh desires
to see on his lawns the villagers of
Lawsleigh, on Thursday, 15th inst.,
at 11 o'clock A.M.

And I agree with you, Kate—the march of the times requires it of him; and I wonder Gray has not pointed it out to him. He may have done so,

and the cards may have been sent. And, in that case, Isaac and Mary may consider themselves among the fortunate invited, and may fortunately come, and, more fortunately still, save the governor and his eleven from the disgrace of an unfortunate defeat. But I am afraid the governor is not yet sufficiently initiated into 'the march of the times' to have adopted so very excellent a plan, for I have heard nothing of it; and then these two excellent people—big Isaac, the handsome, and small Mary, the pretty—must content themselves on the day of the fête with neglect from the parson, their own humble roof for shelter, and their own mutual reproaches at their own mutual loss."

"Charlie, I cannot bear the thought!"

"Nor can I, Kate. The Lawsleigh eleven to be beaten in the dear old governor's old age goes to my very heart!"

"I do not care about your Lawsleigh eleven; they may all be beaten to a mummy for——"

"Kate! Kate!—beat the governor to a mummy? You would find it rather difficult."

"I care about Isaac and Mary, Charlie."

"This comes of 'keeping company' and making

love! The vicar will say it comes of Exhibitions, and so, to a certain extent, it does, for what was only in embryo here, developed itself into a fine butterfly there. And, Kate, talking of exhibitions, a pretty exhibition of their prowess the Lawsleigh eleven will make! Oh! dear—oh! dear!”

“I cannot see how Mr. Hill can go on living in enmity, Charlie.”

“He never does that; and if big Isaac will keep himself sober, the governor will look them up some time or other.”

“Of course Isaac will keep sober, Charlie!”

“I see no ‘of course’ in the matter,” said Charlie, shaking his head.

“Do you not think I could manage to walk to the village, and so tell them I shall expect to see them?”

“Do not put your pretty finger in so exceptionable a pie!”

“Well, then, Mrs. Harcourt: now if she made a favour of it to Mr. Hill?”

Charlie did not reply.

“What do you think, Charlie? Shall I set Mrs. Harcourt to plead for Isaac and Mary?”

"I have heard of 'setting a thief to catch a thief,' but I never heard of setting a handsome widow to plead to her own admirer for a disagreeable drunkard!"

"You will run Isaac down so."

"Kitty! Kitty! I wish I could run him up with a clear conscience. And then that wife of his! Dear me!—dear me!"

"Nay, Charlie, do not say a word against her!"

"The dear old governor's groans this morning were enough to melt a heart of stone."

"Groans, Charlie?"

"At last, in his despair, he turned his kind eyes on me for a moment. I was sitting in the library, pretending to read the *Times*, but, in reality, watching him at his desk, and listening to his half-stifled sighs and occasionally audible groans; and when he turned to me I looked up, quite accidentally, of course, and said, 'Can I help you?—can I do anything?'

"'Ah! Charlie, boy, I must be off—will you just see to this business'—pointing to some papers on his desk—'and get them posted to-day?'

leaving me to finish his work, for off he went like a shot."

"Yes; and what had you to do?"

"Six or seven advertisements, Kitty, for as many different newspapers, making inquiries for a trained and intelligent village schoolmistress."

"Oh! poor Mary!"

"She is offered a cottage and a liberal salary. Now these things try a kind-hearted old man like the governor, and fairly, Kate, I myself cannot stand it—it positively 'tries' me, too."

"But cannot we all three together—you, and I, and Mrs. Harcourt—bring this terrible affair round?"

"If we could make it 'all square' I should be contented."

"Oh! we must manage it somehow."

"Sensible woman, do not become a—a——"

"Well, Charlie, dear, can we do anything?"

"No."

CHAPTER VIII.

HOW ISAAC AND MARY SPENT THE DAY OF THE
FETE AT THE SMITHY COTTAGE.

ON the occasion of a fête at Lawsleigh Vicarage, Mr. Hill generally strolled down the village street and invited the people himself. If a match were to be played, the men were drawn a week or so before the day ; for there were twenty-five members of the Lawsleigh Cricket Club, and from these the eleven were taken. But now the vicar deputed Mr. Gray to go round the village, announce the day, ask the people, and make the necessary arrangements.

Charlie was right—the vicar was troubled. It was a custom at these times for the choir to sing glees and madrigals, while the company feasted.

But no Isaac, and no Mary!—then where were the glees and madrigals? The vicar might well be troubled. He was troubled that Isaac and Mary must be absent; but, then, he was also troubled for the cause that separated him from them, for he could not think Mary had acted prudently. He was troubled for the loss of Isaac's bat; troubled for the loss of Mary's voice; troubled that he could not and must not notice them; troubled that Mary would, in all probability, be wretchedly unhappy for the rest of her life, after her short dream of faith in Isaac was over. In short, the vicar was in a very unusual frame of mind; he was troubled with the anticipation of the fête, which formerly would have been a great pleasure. He foresaw clearly enough the Lawleigh men would have no chance with the Garrison or the Teign-ton-pont Club.

But the day arrived; the sun shone; the air was balmy; the preparations were all completed; the tents erected; flags flying, and even the bells ringing. And now I must admit, no orders had been given about the bells. This was very unusual; but then it was an unusual fête, at an un-

usual time; the people brought together in an unusual way. But as it happened several of the cricketers who had not been drawn for the match were also ringers, and they taking for granted that the bells must ring, as customary at such times, went to the smithy cottage, as a matter of course, for the keys of the belfry. And then Isaac, who had been troubled and unhappy ever since the fête was announced, "saw his way clearly," as he said to himself. He determined to do what he considered to be his duty. He went off immediately with the ringers, and the Lawleigh bells pealed forth. There was always a difference in the ringing if Isaac was in the belfry; and his presence there that morning was known to the vicar as soon as the bells were raised. He happened to be sauntering on the lawn with Mrs. Harcourt. She had addressed some unimportant question to him. Instead of replying, he turned to leave her, as he said, "Excuse me," and walked into the house.

Charlie saw him.

"There, Kate," said he, "the governor hears the bells; he knows Isaac is ringing, though he is

cut off from the pleasure of the day! Now the dear old governor can appreciate such conduct. Some people would say—I will not mention Gray, Kate—but some people would say, ‘the man is only doing his duty.’ Ah! they have cold hearts, Kate; not that I wish to say a word against a man for doing his duty, as ‘England expects every man;’ but I say human nature is human nature; and the man whose nature will allow him to put out a helping hand and try to make a pleasure-party go off well, the sight of which gives him and his pretty wife nothing but pain, such a man’s nature is a noble nature! And the dear old governor feels at this moment that Isaac is a noble fellow, and——”

“Oh! Charlie, perhaps he will send for them.”

“Bosh, Kate.”

The carriages began to arrive; the games commenced; to Miss Lucy Campbell’s delight, there was croquet for those who wished. The villagers came in their best attire, old and young, pretty and plain.

Now the arrival of this day had been a great care to Isaac. He wished so much to comfort and

support Mary through the disgrace of this neglect from Parson Hill; but as Mary said nothing, he also remained passive until some occasion should warrant a remark. He went to the belfry three or four times during the day, as was customary on such contingencies; but each time he felt himself more unpleasantly situated. The men had discovered that instead of going with them to the vicarage for refreshment, he always stopped at the smithy cottage. They saw also that Mary was not at the fête. Then the men began to jeer Isaac, and ask why his wife did not go with the women to see the fun—was she too grand?

And so the day was a long and a weary one to Isaac. To do him but justice, he had no spite or ill-feeling towards Parson Hill. He recognised the propriety of the parson's neglect, until he himself could prove that he deserved better treatment. If he had spoken with Mary at all, he would have pointed out to her that, for the present, they must be contented to try to do well, and wait patiently for the result—wait until his own continued good conduct should convince the parson of his reformation. Once or twice he thought of trying to make

a friend of Mr. Charles Hill, and of making an effort to convince him that the change in himself was real, and that he would be steadfast. But he could not see that any good to him and to Mary would accrue from this ; convincing Master Charlie was not convincing the vicar.

The Widow Simpson was one of the very few who did not go to fêtes of any kind. Isaac went off to the belfry as usual, and both he and Mary were very cheerful in her presence ; the widow had therefore no suspicion of the neglect and disgrace from which they were both suffering.

“Ma-ary, Ma-ary,” said the old woman, “come here.”

The widow was seated in the porch with her knitting, and the gay company were passing by to the fête.

Numbers of carriages drawn by four horses—for the hills were many and steep,—beautiful pony-carriages driven by handsome ladies, a groom at the head of each pony to cheer and assist the pretty creatures at their work over such terrible roads. Gay cavaliers on horseback passed, and after

resting their eyes for a short time on the picturesque old smithy, on the old woman in her quaint attire, and on Mary standing by her side, two or three turned their horses' heads and galloped back again.

Mary did not notice them ; she was telling the names of the visitors to the old woman.

"That is the Vicar of Ashbystead and his lady. Parson Hill and he are very old friends ; he it was who got me the post of schoolmistress here—Mr. Talbot wrote to him for me," and, then, feeling she was treading on dangerous ground, she added, a little hastily, "You see, mother, the Vicar of Ashbystead always drives grey horses ; and he is like Parson Hill, a very kind gentleman, and very much beloved ; and so is his lady also. And, oh ! mother, that is the archdeacon in the funny hat, there, in the next carriage."

"Ma-ary, dear, how skilled you be ; and how does thee know the deacon ?"

"The archdeacon, mother—why, I was confirmed at Ashbystead, and Archdeacon D—— was there ; he was amongst the company that went to the vicarage for luncheon ; and the bishop

was there, mother—I saw him—the Bishop of E——”

“Ma-ary, my dear, I be most mazed. What heaps of quality folk you have a-seed, surely. And the bishop be so big as the Queen, eh, Ma-ary?”

“I do not know, mother; but he is a little man, and——”

“Ma-ary, look, look!”

And now the cavaliers who had been seen galloping back, were again approaching, preceding Major Dashwood’s drag, drawn by four horses, and full of ladies and gentlemen. It stopped at the smithy.

“Ma-ary, they be a-wanting shoes to the horses,” said the old woman, as she stood up and curtseyed.

“Dame, can you tell us the way to the Vicarage?”

“Yes, sir,” said the old woman; “I be sure the lad can do it—he be skilled in them things.”

She thought they had stopped for Isaac to give them some help. And he who had asked the way, had only asked for an excuse to say something—

he did not hear the old woman's reply, for he had busied himself by pointing out to the newly-arrived party the beauty of the situation, &c., &c.

Meanwhile the ladies and gentlemen in the drag were standing up, and every face was turned towards the smithy.

"What a wonderful granite cottage! It must have been built ages ago!—how picturesquely placed!—what a view of magnificent Tors, rising one above another!—what old-fashioned casemented windows!—what a shed for a blacksmith, standing so closely to the side of the cottage!—what a simple-looking village girl!—and what a dear darling old woman!"

Some voices in the drag objected to the last epithet, but the lady who had applied it maintained that it was correct, and that the old woman standing curtsying there was the veriest "darling" of an old woman she had ever seen in her life.

"That is 'a darling' of a young one," said a gentleman's voice.

"Goody, can you tell fortunes?" said a lady.

"What be the quality a-saying, Ma-ary?"

"No, madam. Mother does not tell fortunes," said Mary, blushing.

"Can you eat sugar-plums? Here, dame, hold out your apron."

"Hold out your apron, mother," said Mary.

"And yours, pretty maiden," said a gentleman.

Mary blushed again, but she did as she was told. And such a glittering shower was tossed into her apron by the inmates of the drag—little bunches of gold and silver paper twisted up—she did not understand them at all. Mary and the old woman curtsied and thanked the ladies, and the widow found little sweet cakes in her apron.

Major Dashwood turned to a gentleman riding by the side of the drag, and said :

"Why, the little puss wears a ring!—a plain gold ring!"

"Oh! nonsense!—she cannot be married," said a lady. "Why, she does not look more than sixteen!"

The face was so simple and innocent, cares had not yet prematurely stamped it with wisdom.

"Are you married?" said Major Dashwood.

"Yes, sir," said Mary, curtsying.

"Good; and where, then, is your husband?"

"The lad be a-ringing, please your honour," said the old woman; "but I mind as the horses be a-wanting shoes, and the peal be most out."

The gentlemen did not understand. Mary explained "that the old woman thought they had stopped to have their horses' shoes attended to by Isaac." This made both gentlemen and ladies laugh heartily; and then Mary was told "that they would stop on their return on purpose for 'the smith' to see that the shoes were all right."

"The lad will be sure to wait your honour's pleasure," said the old woman, curtsying.

"Who is 'the lad?'" said a lady.

"My husband, madam—Isaac Watson," said Mary.

The ladies laughed at the idea of a boy and girl being married at so early an age; they imagined Isaac Watson, "the lad," as boyish-looking as Mary was girlish.

"We will call again," said Major Dashwood.

For by this time the drag and the attendant gentlemen on horseback had stopped the way, and

there was a large number of carriages, &c., waiting to move on.

“Crabbed age and youth
Cannot live together—
Youth is full of pleasure,
Age is full of care,”

sang the gentlemen in the drag, as Major Dashwood turned round the corner to the vicarage. But in this instance it was

“Green contented age and
Simple modest youth
Living happily and cosily together.”

When Isaac returned from the belfry this scene was related to him, and the old woman said :

“I telled his honour as you would be a-ready to tend he.”

Mary shewed her gold and silver treasures, and Isaac told her they were “crackers,” probably with mottoes.

“Come, Mary, dear, let us try our luck,” said he.

The old woman was startled by the noise, and astonished at the result.

“And be that there sugar-plum made in that

crack? Massy me!—but it be queer times us lives in!”

When the thin roll of paper was spread open the motto was,

“Love laughs at locksmiths,”

which Mary thought a wonderful idea.

On the return in the evening, true to his word, Major Dashwood stopped at the smithy. Mary and the old woman were in the cottage; Isaac stood at the entrance of the shed.

“We want the ‘smith,’ if you please,” said Major Dashwood.

“I am the ‘smith,’ sir,” said Isaac, doffing his cap—“what can I do to help you?”

“You!” said Major Dashwood, in such a tone of surprise as to astonish Isaac, and make him raise his eyes inquiringly.

The drag was full of ladies and gentlemen, as it had been when it passed in the morning, and quite a cavalcade of gentlemen on horseback came up at the same time.

“Are you then the husband of that pretty young girl we saw this morning?” said a lady.

"I am proud to acknowledge, madam, that I have a very pretty young wife," said Isaac, raising his cap to the lady.

"Have you been married long?"

"Only about a month, madam."

"A month! Then she is your bride?"

But while Isaac's attention was engaged with the lady, Major Dashwood had time to discover that "the lad," whom he had expected to see a hobbledehoy of sixteen or seventeen, was a full-grown, burly-looking, and handsome man, of nearer thirty than sixteen; and, moreover, one who would not be likely to stand any nonsense. He had asked for a "smith," but there was nothing for a smith to do.

"What can I do, sir?—something wrong about the horses?"

"Oh, no! no!" said Major Dashwood. "I asked for you, that we might have permission to enter your cottage. My wife, and her friends, took such a fancy to your pretty bride as they passed this morning, they wanted to see her again."

But the ladies were actually alighting from the

drag ; and then they stood talking to Isaac, and asking questions about the scenery.

And the ladies found Isaac so handsome, so courteous, and so intelligent, so little like "the lad" they had expected to see, that he became as great a wonder to them on that far-off and uncivilized Dartmoor, as his wife or mother had been when they passed in the morning.

The ladies entered the cottage for a minute or two ; but as there was no room for the gentlemen, they stood outside the window, and looked in, and joined in the conversation occasionally.

The sun was near the horizon, and the ladies followed Isaac to look at the view. He pointed out now this Tor, now that, as seen from the entrance to his shed.

The scene was totally different from the brilliant one of the morning ; in some respects it was even more beautiful, for the presence of deep shadow enhances the radiance and splendour of light.

And while Isaac bestowed his courtesies on the ladies, Mary and the old woman came forth to talk to the gentlemen. And then Isaac stood back and held his hat high over his head—Mary thought

he was imitating Parson Hill; but Isaac was habitually punctilious and polite—while the gentlemen handed the ladies into the drag.

“Here, Goody, have some sweet cake,” said one.

And the widow again held out her apron.

“The bride must have a bouquet,” said a gentleman.

“Mr. Smith—for I do not know your name—” said Mrs. Dashwood, “where is your bride?—she shall have our flowers.”

“My name is Isaac Watson, madam. Mary, my dear, come here.”

And Mary once more held out her apron, and all the handsome bouquets that had been put together with such pride for that day’s fête were thrown to Mary, as if she had been one of those queens of song accustomed to such oblations.

But no. She was only queen of the smith’s heart; and her kingdom was the smithy cottage.

“A cheer for the smith and his bride!” said the gentlemen.

And then uprose the hearty cheer that only English lungs can give; and the cavalcade moved

on—Isaac bowing, Mary and the old woman curtsying as long as they were in sight.

And when the scene was over, Isaac clasped Mary in his arms, and declared he never had been so proud and so happy in all his life.

“I declare at this minute I am as happy as a king, even though I am in such sad disgrace with our kind old friend—for he was a friend, Mary—Parson Hill.”

And Charlie was right. Parson Hill and the Lawsleigh eleven were ignominiously beaten.

CHAPTER IX.

OF THE WICKEDNESS OF THE SEWING-MACHINE.

AS soon as the smithy cottage was divested of as much of Mary's furniture as could be stowed away in the temporary shed, Mary set herself steadily to work. The sewing-machine was brought into use, to the old woman's manifest astonishment. She could not find out how it could do so many stitches in so short a time, all so neat and regular; for she still prided herself on her very neat sewing, and was therefore a good judge of such work. She watched Mary, and saw the quantity done in half an hour; this excited her wonder and awe; her intellect seemed powerless to comprehend that so much could be done in so short a lapse of time, and by one woman!

"Her canna be a witch," said the widow to herself, as she gazed at Mary in mute amazement. "But sometimes I be almost feared! Her be a nice young meeden. I be a-wishing her wouldna go a-working in that way. It be as if her had a-gotten the 'old one' to help she!"

And the old woman's awe, combined with her ignorance, was gradually communicated to others, until at length the sewing-machine was talked about in the village as something uncanny. Little by little the position of Isaac and Mary altered in the village of Lawsleigh—almost imperceptibly at first, but still surely. On Sunday, when they went to church, they did not receive the friendly nods and greetings to which they had been accustomed. Isaac, in his attempts to get a tarpaulin and afterwards help of different kinds, as well as masons to build his new rooms, had gradually learned that the people of Lawsleigh were more pleased to jeer and ridicule than to aid him in his present position. The loss of Parson Hill's countenance and protection was quite enough. The bad now had Isaac somewhat more in their power. The timid did not wish to be mixed up in such

quarrels, and so kept aloof; while the strong said,

“Us will see what that great big Isaac be a-made on. Him hath a-been reading the passon’s books; him havena gotten no books from the passon now!”

Mary had been as great an object of jealousy to the women as Isaac to the men. To some—for example, Jane Sands—she had given offence by her treatment of the children in the school, which treatment, however just, was not understood by their mothers. These women were as glad of Mary’s change of position with Parson Hill as the men were at Isaac’s. Such is human nature! Rejoicing in the downfall of a fellow-creature, whether deserved or not, and ready to return imaginary evils with real insults. But at the close of the day Isaac said to himself,

“The Sunday is over at last!—what a weary day! How unlike a Sunday! it has been such a long, long day. How ill the men behaved in the belfry—putting every peal wrong—hunting out of compass. But what is the use of thinking—”

And, resuming the subject soon afterwards,

“As for the choir, I really thought they would

not let Mary get up to her place. I managed to push into mine—but she, poor thing! she has not my strength. Now, I wonder what they all mean? It seems as if they meant to get me out of the bells and out of the singing!—Well, well, I must take it quietly. And next Sunday, Mary and I must mind and go in good time, and so secure our places early, and do away with this unpleasantness.”

Isaac said nothing to Mary, hoping she did not take the conduct of the choir to heart. And Mary said nothing to Isaac, for she thought it her duty to try to bear the evils of her position with patience, since undoubtedly she had brought them on herself. On the Monday the weather became fine and warm; there were cold showers on the Sunday, but now the temperature was higher, and the air balmy. In the afternoon, Mary asked Isaac to lift the sewing-machine into his shed, for said she,

“I perceive you are at quiet work to-day, Isaac; that great hammer is rather too much for me, if I am very near—”

“Yes, my dear, of course it is. I shall be

obliged to use it before the afternoon is over, but I will delay it as long as I can, for your sake."

Mary was some time preparing work for the machine before she could use it. The old woman eyed it furtively every now and then, half afraid to remain seated on her stool so close to it.

At length Isaac was ready to use his hammer earlier than he had expected, and made some little apology to Mary for the noise he must necessarily make. But the widow told him it was music to her, and she liked to knit to the sound of it. And so, when Mary put her machine in motion, there were the three sounds chiming merrily together, as it seemed to her. For the old woman went on with the "click, click" of her knitting, Isaac with the "bump, bump" of his great hammer, and Mary with the rapid "tric-trac" of her machine.

Mary was silent, from the fact that her work required all her attention; Isaac, from a newly-found faculty, that of building castles in the air as to the future happiness of himself and Mary; but the old woman did not speak from absolute

fright. She tried to conquer this feeling, because, said she to herself :

“The meeden be good, and the lad be good, and him gived the thing to she, so it canna be wrong. But I be most mazed, and I be a-thinking what be all the young meedens to do for work! Coz why, one of them can do so much as twenty; and be all the tother nineteen to stand idle?

‘For Satan finds some mischief still,
For idle hands to do.’

The thing must be the work of the ‘old one,’ just to get the tother young meedens to stand idle, and then him will find some mischief for them. Poor things! I give them my prayers, poor things! I be all of a tremble with thinking about such things. It must be no good to have such a thing in the cottage; I will shut my eyes and not see it.”

But while she sat thus, attempting to shut out evil from her sight, it appeared to her that by some strange chance Isaac’s hammer and Mary’s machine kept time together. She opened her eyes to look if they had approached nearer to each other. No. Isaac was at work with his back to Mary, and yet, somehow, the hammer and the

machine seemed to understand each other. She once more closed her eyes to try and shut out from her sight and mind this dreadful companionship, but without effect. Bump, bump, bump, went Isaac's hammer ; tric-trac, tric-trac, tric-trac, went Mary's machine. And then she suddenly remembered that

" Satan finds some mischief still,
For idle hands to do."

And she started into active life, and began to knit at her topmost speed. What was her astonishment and terror to find that now her needles also kept time with the great hammer and the dreaded machine !

Knit, knit, knit, on she went, saying to herself, " Massy me ! massy me !" She raised her eyes, and saw Mary looking calm and contented as an angel. She turned to Isaac, who no longer stood with his back to her and Mary, and his face was radiant with the joy in store for him and Mary in his aerial palaces.

" The ' old one ' be making both of them happy, and if he should clutch hold of them before they

finds out his tricks, what be I to do? I be that mazed, I——”

She sat still for a short time with her knitting lying on her lap, but was again aroused to exertion by the lines she had twice before repeated, “For Satan finds, &c.,” and she resumed her knitting.

“I be a-knitting slow, and slow, and slow; and then mayhap I shall put the ‘old one’ out of his count, and break up the thread of the witchery,” said she to herself.

She did so—tried to knit slowly—but to her horror and alarm found her needles were still keeping time with Isaac’s hammer and Mary’s machine.

“It must be she as done it; she must be a witch a helping of the ‘old one’ to clutch hold of the lad and me. I be fair mazed! I must call to the neighbours—I must give a big shout!” but, in attempting to make a noise, the poor old woman fell from her stool insensible.

Isaac, as may well be imagined, was by her side in an instant; and if the good old woman could have opened her eyes, and have known that her

fall had had the effect of stopping both the big hammer and the bright machine, she might even have been contented to have been taken ill. But as it was, Isaac lifted her up tenderly, and carried her into the cottage, and placed her on Mary's couch, which, fortunately, had been left in the large room down-stairs.

"I will set off for a doctor, Mary," said Isaac ; "shall I try to get some neighbour to come to you while I am away ?"

All this time they were chafing the old woman's hands, and placing her in a comfortable position.

"It is warmth and comfort that old people want, Isaac, more than doctors and medicine. Suppose you get some blankets and pillows downstairs, and suppose we make up a good fire and give her something hot."

Independent of these being Mary's real feelings—for she had had some experience in such cases, by having nursed a great-aunt through an illness—she did not like the thought of Isaac going so far away from her. And Isaac, though he did not care a straw for the fatigue and trouble of walking

across the moor, was, nevertheless, glad to feel that he might remain at home.

In time, as Mary had foretold, the old woman revived. She did not seem to know what had occasioned her illness ; she regretted being—what she called—a burden to Isaac and Mary, taking up their time. But it was evident to them both that her perceptions were none of the clearest. She was of a great age ; Isaac had heard her say she was married on her twentieth birthday ; and then the record in the “old Simpsons Bible” would prove her to be in her ninety-fifth year. But longevity was common on the moor, and her age was not an unusual one for dwellers there. She seemed scarcely to remember any recent event, for when she spoke—excepting to thank them for their kind nursing—it was with reference to some occurrence in her past life.

CHAPTER X.

OF THE SUNDAY MORNING AT LAWSLEIGH.

AS may well be understood, Mary's work with the sewing-machine was stopped for that day. The machine was not replaced in the old woman's sight, and fortunately there was nothing to recall the late scene to her mind. In a day or two she seemed quite herself again, and Mary began to resume her enjoyment of the machine. But as the weather was less warm, and it was thought imprudent for the old woman to sit so long in Isaac's shed, Mary went on with her employment in the large room; and the widow, as she busied herself in household affairs, was not acted upon, for the time being, by the noise of the machine, the more especially as Isaac's hammer was not at

work. But in the course of the morning, James Marvel looked in at the open widow, and said,

“Mistress Watson, and pray what be you about?”

“I am making some aprons for mother,” said Mary, pleased with James Marvel’s notice, and gratified by the exhibition of her skill.

“But, Mistress Watson,” said James, knitting his brows, pushing his cap on one side, and his fingers through his hair, “do you mean to say as that there dumb critter can help you, or, leastways, do a stitch of this here fine work?”

“It be fair oncanny, James,” said the widow, “been’t it?” as she felt her terror revive.

“Oncanny, widdy!—I do not just see that, to this time—coz why? there be such heaps of these machines, as does everything; but, widdy, it be astonishing—to my mind it be wonderful astonishing!” and James leaned into the room as far as he could, to get a better sight of the curious invention.

“Come in, Mr. Marvel,” said Mary.

“No, thank you,” said James, drawing back in

spite of his curiosity ; " I must be off—it be a queer kind of chatterer, that critter there. ' Morning, Mistress Watson—morning, widdy."

As James walked down the village he was accosted by first one and then another, asking for news, to which James replied,

" I have a-comed from the smithy, and I havena a-heard no news."

" What be Isaac 'bout to the smithy?" said one.

" I havena seed Isaac ; I just stopped at the window, and speaked to Mistress Watson ; and, to my mind, that chattering critter be a queer one."

" What dost mean, lad—Isaac's wife?"

" No, no, that queer machine as the mistress does she's sewing with. The old widdy thinks it be oncanny, and I be blest if I don't most 'gree with she."

This was enough for the unlettered inhabitants of Lawsleigh, for James Marvel was a great authority. Their ignorance alone would lead them to invest such a machine with supernatural powers. No kind of machinery had been seen on the moor ;

the roughest kinds of farming implements were still in use. The old never left their homes to see the wonders of this age of science, as gradually new marvels were introduced; and the young, if they did occasionally go to the surrounding towns, were uninterested in what they did not comprehend; and for the most part, in their isolation from society, were too shy, and even too ignorant, to ask questions, and—if it were ever awakened—satisfy their curiosity.

And so the sewing machine began to be talked of in Lawsleigh as a something unlawful to possess and dangerous to use. The “wise men” and “wise women,” who were known to inhabit remote parts of the moor, required no such assistance in their art. They could tell where the cow that had strayed from her pasture might be found. They could tell where the skin of the sheep that had been lost on such a night was hidden! And many other wonderful things were at their command, without the assistance of his “sable majesty.” For all of which knowledge they were duly honoured, looked up to, and dreaded. None would dare to offend a “wise man” or a “wise

woman," the consequences of such effrontery would be terrible. But here was a young woman setting herself up above everybody, and possessing a cursed machine, with which she could do any amount of mischief! Abraham Clark's colt died. Three days ago, it was as fine a colt as any on the moor!

"It must be she as have a-done it!"

John Lear's cart broke down a-coming over the moor with coals for the parson; he had been told to fetch fifteen hundred at a time, but he brought eighteen hundred, "fifteen for the passon and three for himself," and his cart ran up against a piece of granite, and the wheel was wrenched off!

"It must be *she* as done it!"

Innumerable were the instances of witchcraft and diablerie assigned to Mary, and the talk in the village became daily more abusive. Isaac did not notice that at all sorts of odd times the men of the village would come by threes and fours, with stealthy steps, and peer in at the large window that looked into the street, and then creep as silently away. It was now October, and the widow and Mary no longer sat in the shed, but

pursued their separate avocations in the one large room ; and besides, as there was a certain amount of work that must be done by hand before the machine could be used, and also a certain amount of finishing after the machine had done its part, it followed that sometimes Mary did not use it for several consecutive days. And so the Sunday came round again, and as Isaac had promised himself to be at church early, the trio set off in very good time. It had been Isaac's custom to take his grandmother and place her in her pew before he went into the belfry to ring. She said "she liked to sit in the church and read her bible," and this she had done all the long summer. But after Isaac's marriage he went to the belfry at the proper time alone, and Mary and the old woman came at the time appointed for the assembling of the congregation. But on this day Isaac left the ringers to manage the bells as they pleased, for he had set his heart on securing his old seat in the choir without having to bandy words with his fellow-townsmen, and also on seeing Mary comfortably placed. And so they entered the church some minutes earlier than usual, and first took the

old woman to her accustomed seat, and then turned to place themselves. What was their astonishment to find the seats appropriated to the choir quite full! All the old singers were there, and several new ones, who, Isaac knew—or suspected—had no business there. He went forward bravely to face the men who were trying to annoy him, and asked,

“Why they had not left room for him, and why Mary’s place was filled up?”

“The passon said as I might come and sing,” said one; and several voices speaking together assured Isaac that there were none there without the consent and approval of the vicar.

“Let us come away!” said Mary, gently, for the congregation began to assemble.

“You can ax the passon what you bees to do!” said another, in a jeering tone, to Isaac.

This struck a sensitive chord in his heart, and he feared, if he asked for an explanation from Parson Hill, that he should be no better off; for he thought it very improbable that the parson would see him. He looked kindly down upon Mary, and listened to her request to turn away from the choir.

And after a few moments of indecision—for though he knew these men had no right to usurp his place, he also knew that was not a time or locality to exert his prerogative—he granted her request, and they went and seated themselves by the old woman.

This harsh and unexpected treatment of Isaac and Mary by their neighbours did not prevent them from lifting up their voices in praise, and their hearts in prayer to their Maker. It is true, they both felt humbled and cast down; they both felt they had been unjustly deposed from an authority vested in them by the vicar himself. But it is in the season of our humility we turn more truly to our God for help, and Isaac and Mary “humbled themselves before the Lord.”

When the service was over, Isaac had prepared himself to pass unrecognised, as it were, with his mother and wife, by those whom he had known from childhood. Some amongst the women said, “Morning, widdy, and how be you?” But the mass of the people passed the three unnoticed, or sneered at them, and muttered to each other as they walked on.

Isaac was prepared for this, but not for what followed. The Widow Mason was standing amid a group of men half-way down the broad walk that led to the church, and as Isaac and his wife and mother approached, she said aloud :

"It be she as have a-done it ! Her has a-got a dumb 'critter' as can sew, and her be a witch ! And her deserves burning with fire and brimstone, she do !" and she snapped her fingers in Mary's face.

"Hollo there !" said Isaac, sharply, and turning round upon the six or seven who were following them. Then, remembering in an instant that the day was Sunday, and the locale the churchyard, he felt he must not give cause of offence, or it might be the means of raising an unseemly brawl ; he therefore moderated the tone of his voice, and said : "What is the matter, pray ?"

"The matter, Isaac !" said one, apparently more friendly than the rest ; "why, it be said in the village as you have a-gotten a witch for your wife !"

"A witch !" said Isaac, in a tone more of surprise than anger ; "and who dares say such a

falsehood !—I may say such an absurdity?"

"They have a-seed she and the 'critter' a-talking together," said the Widow Mason, in loud tones.

"Have seen who talking together?" said Isaac, now standing still, and facing his foes.

"Why, the 'critter' and Molly there," said the widow, pointing to Mary.

Isaac understood she meant some insult, but the sewing-machine was as far from his thoughts as the Tors are from heaven! After a little pause, he said :

"I know not what you mean, unless that you mean to tease Mary because she is my wife, or even to try to worry me because I have given up drinking cider."

Here he was interrupted by jeers and suppressed laughter, and he turned on his way home, as he said :

"At all events, it is very unneighbourly conduct."

"It be unneighbourly to hide a dumb 'critter' in your cottage as witches everybody!—that be unneighbourly!"

Isaac was about to reply, but at this instant Mr. Gray was seen coming out of the church, and the crowd separated, and went on their different routes, and he and his wife and mother went on towards the smithy.

Now, of the trio that had stood to be insulted in the churchyard of Lawsleigh, the old woman had the best comprehended what charge was made, and against whom. She did not say anything, she thought Isaac and Mary understood as well as herself. For every now and then, at intervals of time, the scene in the smithy, when the great hammer, the knitting-needles, and the machine made, in her imagination, so unmusical a trio, arose unbidden to her mind's eye. She did not remember falling down ill, she had glimpses of the scene as it had really occurred, and the locale was so correct, and she was so accustomed to sit there, that she sometimes thought it must have happened.

Fortunately that was the only time that the machine had been carried into the shed, and as she could not remember ever having seen it any where but in its corner in the large room, this circum-

stance left room for doubt, and she could not tell if she had had a dream, or if it had been a reality. She had heard James Marvel call it a "dumb critter," and, in her ignorance, she attached a meaning of witchcraft to the words. She had once said to herself, speaking of Mary, "Her canna be a witch ; coz why ?—her be good !" But when she heard her called "a witch" by others, she began to doubt her own judgment. And so, on this Sunday, slowly and sadly, Isaac and his wife and mother returned to the smithy,

CHAPTER XI.

“ENGLAND EXPECTS THAT EVERY MAN THIS DAY
SHALL DO HIS DUTY.”

AND on the Monday Isaac's thoughts were still more gloomy than they had been in the previous week. He knew Parson Hill was too just to take from him either the choir or the bells as long as his own conduct was irreproachable. But, as regarded Mary's position in the choir, room for doubt had arisen in his mind. Isaac knew from good authority that advertisements were out in the different county papers, making inquiry for a schoolmistress for Lawsleigh—one with a good soprano voice and a knowledge of music, as she would be expected to lead the choir. Therefore it appeared to Isaac that, when the post of school-

mistress was taken away from Mary, she also lost her position in the choir. Isaac saw that Mary did not understand this, but, as he systematically avoided any subject that could give her pain, he did not enlighten her.

Mary was not exactly in so happy a frame of mind as when she first married, constantly recurring annoyances kept her always in dread of an undefined something. Her sadness was only heard in the tones of her voice, or guessed from her reticence, sitting apart apparently in deep thought, instead of chatting cosily on any, or all subjects, as she had been accustomed to do, for she was not of a complaining temper. And then, though Isaac knew it not, she had no confidence in his reformation. The smell from the cider thrown upon him by the Widow Mason had never entirely left his clothes. Isaac himself thought nothing of it, indeed, scarcely perceived it, but this occasional whiff of something sour, as Isaac passed and repassed, was a disagreeable reminder to Mary of the night at the school cottage, and it sometimes increased her sadness. And though Mary's confidence in Isaac's integrity was dis-

turbed, she did not make herself still more unhappy by watching or setting spies upon him. He was often absent attending to his trade in the different cottages or farmhouses in and near Lawleigh ; she knew he had plenty of opportunities to go to the "Packhorse" unknown to her, and she had been told he could drink a large quantity of cider without producing any unpleasant effect. It is true he never had been actually inebriated in her presence since their marriage, he had never offended her sensitiveness so grossly, but she lived in the apprehension that even this last misfortune might happen.

Isaac, who felt so strong in his good faith—Isaac, who had lost all relish for the cider that was to take him into low company and away from Mary—Isaac, who longingly looked forward to the time when Parson Hill should again become his "friend"—Isaac had no conception of Mary's doubts. He had never told her of the Widow Mason's ill treatment of him when he went to fetch Jacob from the "Packhorse;" it was a principle with him to avoid all disagreeable subjects or discussions.

"Mary would not like to hear of such unseemly brawls—how should she, poor thing?"

And Isaac did not like to speak of them. The remembrance of the scenes at the "Packhorse" on that very evening had made Isaac silent and stern when he returned to Mary.

Isaac was indignant with himself that he had ever in his life condescended to sit under the roof of such a woman, or mix with such a low class of the uneducated on Dartmoor. Isaac was praying in his heart for strength to do away with the erring past, and for courage to go on in a more respectable and satisfactory course. And poor Mary misread these signs, and grew faint with the smell of cider. But now, at this period of her life, Mary said,

"I have not even the comfort of thinking I can trust to his word—that was very soon over, as Parson Hill told me it would. Only I *do* pray to God that he will not leave me here long, though I could be so happy," added she with a sigh; "but I know I cannot bear to see him become like Peter Barker."

And Mary shuddered as she recalled the horrible scene of Hannah Barker's death.

Isaac saw these fits of gloomy abstraction seize upon Mary at intervals. When he could afford the time, he would sit down by her side and turn the current of her thoughts into a happier channel. On one occasion Mary was searching for something that could not be found, and Isaac wanted to know if he could help her, or if she had lost anything of consequence.

"Yes ; it is of great consequence, Isaac. It is my knitting gauge. I cannot think where I could have put it when I came from the school."

But Isaac interrupted her. The "school-cottage" was a painful subject, and should be mentioned but seldom, if at all.

"Never mind where you put it, Mary ; tell me what it is like. Perhaps I can make you one."

"You make one ! Oh ! I am sure you cannot !" said she, thoughtlessly.

Isaac only said,

"But perhaps you will explain to me what you want."

"Why, mother has a large piece of knitting for the centre of a counterpane ; and I want to find needles of the same size as those she used."

"Yes; now show me your needles."

"Look, Isaac!"—and Mary took up a piece of knitting and some needles that were lying on the table—"This needle, when I put it into the stitch, is too small; this too large. Now, if I had my gauge, I could try the sizes of these two needles, and know the number of the intermediate size, and so send by the carrier for——"

"Send, my dear! I will get you what you want. I dare say I have the proper sized wire in store. I will look. Give me the two needles."

Isaac went into the shed, and soon returned with wire of the exact size, which he promised to fashion into knitting needles immediately.

"Is your gauge a piece of brass with holes in it?" said Isaac, as he worked away at the knitting needles.

"Yes, Isaac. I cannot think where I can have put it."

"Here it is, my dear," said Isaac, as he took it from a shelf in his shed, and tossed it to her. "I picked it up that wet night, when I was stowing away your furniture. I did not know what it was, and put it in my pocket, meaning to ask you about

it, my dear; but that delicious coffee you made put it quite out of my head, more shame for me, my dear. And the next morning, when I found it in my pocket, I put it on the shelf, and forgot all about it. You see, Mary, I have had so many things to think of."

And Isaac stifled a sigh.

But Isaac had quite sent away Mary's sadness.

"How glad I am to have my gauge! Thank you, Isaac. And what nice needles—just the very size, I do declare! Oh, mother, do look!—is he not clever!"

And once more Mary was the proud married woman—proud of her handsome husband, and proud of his great expertness. Although Isaac "laughed in his sleeve" at the idea of Mary thinking so much of her knitting needles.

"And now, Isaac, you just tell us," said Mary. "You see mother knitted this a long time ago;" and she unfolded a large piece of very fine knitting, yellow with age. "She did it for the centre of a counterpane; and then, you see, she had other work to do, and it did not get finished."

"It is a very large piece of work, Mary—astonishingly large, I should say."

"Yes; but it is most beautifully done, Isaac; and I was thinking of knitting a deep border, that would make it large enough for our bed. And so nice and cool for a summer quilt it would be—would it not?"

"Ay, Ma-ary, them coverlids be cool to summer times," said the old woman.

"It seems to me a very nice piece of work," said Isaac, "though I am no judge; and of course it would be useful."

"Yes; and was it not lucky I made mother turn it out? She had got it shut up in a large chest."

"It was lucky, indeed; how did you know she had such a piece of fine work? I am sure I did not," said Isaac.

"Why, I was showing mother my patterns, and choosing one for a centre, to make one all myself. Look, Isaac, here they are."

And Mary spread out her books of patterns.

"These are splendid!" said Isaac in astonishment. "You do not mean, Mary, that you can imitate these beautiful designs in knitting?"

"She be rare and skilled, Isaac, Ma-ary be. I

have a-seed some as she has a-done, and it be 'stonishing grand, surely !"

"But, my dear, if you can do such wonderful devices as these, why do you not make the counterpane all new together? Mother's work cannot be done in patterns like these."

"No, lad, I didn't never see such hard things as them be. But I doed the letters; and them was thought so much of in my young days, as Ma-ary's hard patterns be now."

"Letters?" said Isaac, in a tone of inquiry.

"There is a beautiful motto in this centre piece of mother's," said Mary; "no such things are ever seen now; and it is so beautiful—just help me to spread it out."

"It be about Nelson, lad," said the old woman; "in my young days us was most mazed about Nelson."

"About Nelson!" said Isaac, in a tone of wonder, as he helped to unfold the work.

"Ay, lad, about Nelson. Now, Ma-ary, I be a-going to take this corner, and you the tother, and let the lad read about Nelson."

And Mary and the old woman stepped back

towards the window, holding the work by the two upper corners, so that as the two lower fell to the ground, the light at the back made the motto clear. And Isaac read aloud, "England expects that every man shall do his duty."

"Is it not beautiful?" said Mary, with enthusiasm. "Nothing of the kind to be seen now-a-days."

"Oh! most beautiful," said Isaac, rubbing his hands, and laughing gleefully. "Why, mother, how clever you are!"

"Clever!" said Mary; "indeed, it is very clever—do look how perfect every letter is; and such quaint letters too." And she waved the work backwards and forwards, looking down upon it admiringly.

"Mother, mother," said Isaac, rushing up to the old woman and caressing her, "it is the most splendid piece of work I ever saw in my life; and so appropriate, as you say, about Nelson, and cool in the summer. I am so pleased I cannot help laughing."

And Isaac laughed and danced about the cottage in the exuberance of his glee.

"Now, it would never do to lose this, Isaac, would it?" said Mary, in a tone of hopeful inquiry.

"Lose it?" said Isaac, in a hearty tone, "why, it is worth untold gold. What Englishman would ever wish to forget Nelson? Mother, it does you honour and credit to give us a chance of remembering the old fellow." And then Isaac seized upon Mary and caressed her, as he said in a serious tone, but with a merry glitter in his eye, "And England does, even in our day, 'expect every man to do his duty,' and of course, my dear, I will do mine."

"Yes, Isaac; that was just what I said to mother—you always do your duty when you know it; and so, you see, it is the more valuable because it is so true. And then such a nice keepsake it is of dear mother's work."

"That be like you, Ma-ary, dear; and I be glad as I doed it in my young days. And it be all right for the lad, Ma-ary—coz why? Isaac always does his duty, and 'tends to everything."

"Well, to my mind, it is the most wonderful thing that this wonderful century has as yet

produced," said Isaac, rubbing his hands with great glee.

"And lad, when I doed it, nobody thought nothing about it," said the old woman.

"Very strange," said Isaac; "why, I think very much of it."

"And so do I," said Mary; "and I shall knit a border to go all round—will it not be beautiful?"

"Why, there was not many folk in Lawsleigh as could tell they letters in my young days. Isaac Simpson—rest his saule—was a larned man. I knowed some things afore I was wed, and then Isaac larned I more—coz why? he would have I to read to he in the 'old Simpsonses Bible;' and the Lawsleigh folk said I be a larned woman to that time. But bless your pretty face, Ma-ary, they Lawsleigh folk couldna understand 'bout Nelson!"

"I am quite sure they did not understand," said Isaac, stroking his chin, as he smiled on his mother.

"And be you going to put something 'bout Nelson round the border, Ma-ary?"

"Why, I do not know," said Mary, thoughtfully ;
"what do you think, Isaac?"

"I think that, as it now stands, it cannot be surpassed," said Isaac, in a very cheery tone ;
"and I think it is quite enough about Nelson ;
and I also think one of Mary's beautiful patterns round it for a border will finish it off admirably, and make it a prize such as few possess."

"Such a wonderful thought," said Mary, "because the motto is so well known, and so good, and yet seldom or never used!"

"An excellent thought, my dear," said Isaac, "and admirably worked, though I do not pretend to be a judge."

"I can see you be pleased," said the widow, "and I do be proud of thee, lad—coz why?—thee does thy duty."

"To be sure I do, mother," said Isaac, again smiling.

"Eh, Mary? The lad, he does his duty, and does his work every day, and makes the cottage cheery with his noises—"

"Yes, mother, Isaac is very good."

Mary was so entranced with the wonderful

counterpane, she quite forgot, for the time being, Isaac's breach of faith, and only remembered his good qualities.

"If I did not do my duty," said Isaac, again catching hold of Mary and caressing her, "I had need to be ashamed of myself. But never you think I shall be such a lazy laggard of a man—I am made of better stuff—and I will always do my duty, my dear, I promise you."

"Of course, Isaac," said Mary, gently disengaging herself from his embrace.

"I be that happy 'bout that coverlid," said the old woman, "as I be most mazed to feel so cheery, *I be*."

And Isaac went to work in his shed, with the smile still lingering on his face, and the glitter in his eye.

CHAPTER XII.

“COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS
BEFORE.”

“WHY does Mrs. Harcourt want to go away?”
said Parson Hill to Mrs. Hill.

“She does not wish to go,” said Mrs. Hill.

“Then why does she go?” said the parson.

“Nay. I should say, ask her, not me!”

“I have asked her to stay longer, but she seems
to think she must go.”

“That is absurd,” said Charlie.

“Very, for so sensible a woman, more absurd
than—than one likes—” and the vicar walked
hastily away in an unusually testy mood.

“What can be the matter now?” said Charlie,
“and what can that charming widow be about to

think of running away at this crisis in her fate?"

The sharp pattering of rain was heard upon the windows, and the vicar returned.

"Then you cannot tell me why Mrs. Harcourt wishes to go to town?"

"No, I cannot, she has not announced her intention to me," said Mrs. Hill.

"Do you know if she has any particular engagement?"

"I am afraid she is *not* engaged," said Mrs. Hill.

"Humph!" said the vicar, testily, "I thought as much."

"But then, if you think that an evil, it can easily be remedied," said Charlie.

"What is an evil?" said the vicar, abstractedly.

"That the Widow Harcourt is still a widow," said Charlie.

"Oh-h—" said the vicar, as if Charlie had given him a new idea; and then he drew himself up and said,

"If she must go to town, she must; of course I do not wish to stand in her way;" and he turned to leave the room.

"I do not see any 'must' in the case," said Charlie, crossing the vicar's path, and preventing him from making his escape. "If you were to ask her—if you were to propose to her—if you were to tell her you hope she will not go to town, perhaps you might succeed in preventing such a calamity," while Mrs. Hill turned aside to hide her smiles.

"She knows I do not want her to go; she knows I am delighted—or she ought to know—delighted to have her here; what can I say or do more?—Do you think, Charlie, I am going to put my private wishes in opposition to hers?"

"Oh, nothing of the sort; I quite think her private wishes and yours coincide."

"Do you look upon me, at my time of life, as a mass of selfishness!—who, because I enjoy the society of so charming and so intellectual a woman—because I delight myself in her amiability—in her—well—her—I mean I am not such a selfish dog as to—to wish her to stay here—here on Dartmoor, at the fag end of civilization, when she has London to go to—the finest capital in the world—all London to worship her—all the re-

sources of London for the cultivation and enjoyment of her own charming mind—all the amusements of London, the refined amusements, to solace her when she pleases, or when she has nothing better to do. No, Charlie, I am not so selfish; and, I may add, I do not wonder that she wishes to return—the marvel would be if she did not.”

“She really does not wish to go back!” said Mrs. Hill, impulsively.

The vicar stooped his head in the attitude of listening, and remained silent.

“She does not wish to go, I assure you,” said Mrs. Hill.

“Nonsense, my dear Kate!” said the vicar; “or, pardon my rudeness, it is true ladies are sometimes difficult to comprehend, and I may have mistaken Mrs. Harcourt’s meaning. I understood her to say she wished to go to town one day this week. Then, does she tell you she wishes to stay here, at the same time she asks me to send her there? If she does, it is acting unlike herself.”

“Perhaps she is sensitive,” said Charlie, “and thinks she is making a long visit.”

"She is sensitive," said the vicar, "and did say something of that sort. I then asked her to lengthen her visit."

"She could not refuse that !" said Charlie.

"And why not ? I tell you she does refuse !"

"Oh ! she would not refuse you if you would only ask her in the right way."

The vicar was very obtuse ; he did not understand the hint.

"She is shy—very shy," said Charlie.

"Charlie, boy ! what on earth is there to be shy about ?"

And the vicar turned to leave the room.

"Suppose you were to repeat your invitation ; put it in a different form ; she might accept."

"I do not think so, Charlie," said the vicar, again turning round ; "and, besides, I am a man of few words."

"I shall be so sorry to lose her," said Mrs. Hill.

"You see, there is no denying the fact that London is the place for her ; she will be appreciated !" said the vicar.

"Indeed, I think we all appreciate her here ; if

that is all, she need not go to London to be appreciated!"

"Ah! my dear Kate, I do not wonder at your eloquence. But—I cannot see that I can do anything more," added he, thoughtfully. "I have asked her to stay longer, and she gave me the impression that she thought she had been here long enough."

"Long enough! She has not been half long enough!" said Charlie, with energy.

The vicar smiled as he said,

"I really do not know how long she has been, and I told her so. I told her it appeared a very short time to me, and—and indeed I went so far as to say I should be very sorry to lose her."

Here the vicar paused, and looked his listeners in the face, turning first to one and then to the other.

"We shall all be sorry," said Charlie. "I declare it will make quite a revolution in all our doings if we lose Mrs. Harcourt!"

"I shall miss her so much, I think I must try and persuade her to stay a little longer," said Mrs. Hill.

"Yes, she must not go," said Charlie. "She ought by this time to know better than to play her cards so ill."

The vicar looked from one to another, and remained silent.

"If you would only propose to her," said Charlie; "that is, make proposals."

"Well, Charlie?" said the vicar, looking brightly up.

"You see it is all in your own hands—or you ought to see!"

"But I don't see, Charlie! What do you mean to propose to me to do?"

"No, no, I did not want to propose to you, but for you to propose to Mrs. Harcourt!"

"To stay longer?" said the vicar. "Ah! I have done that once. It will not be right to press her to remain here when she can be so much happier in London."

"I disagree with you entirely," said Charlie; "I feel sure she will be happy here, if you will let her."

There was a pause of a few seconds, and then the vicar said, in a tone of intense surprise:

"Charlie, what are you driving at? What queer idea have you got in your head?"

The vicar turned and left the room hastily, and Mr. and Mrs. Charles Hill were left looking at each other in silent astonishment. Charlie broke the spell.

"Then, Kate, he never did mean to marry her after all?"

"I am sure I cannot tell what he meant! What will Mrs. Harcourt think?"

"What a strange affair!" said Charlie, as he walked up and down the room. "Here was I pleasing myself with the idea that the dear old governor's old age would be made happy by the companionship of so charming a woman as Mrs. Harcourt, and all the time he is bent upon thinking her happiness lies in London!"

"It is abominably selfish, after all his attentions to her!"

"No, Kate, dear, he is not selfish;" and then Charlie became thoughtful. "If I knew what to do—but I do not," resumed he, "I would do it; for I confess, Kate, I am sorry to see this affair broken off thus."

“And now look, Charlie,” said Mrs. Hill, as she pointed to the lawn.

The shower had passed, the sun shone, and Parson Hill and Mrs. Harcourt were walking together.

“Yes, Kate; and he smiles, and looks down upon her, and she looks up to him, and gives him the same sunny look. Oh, Kitty! Kitty!”

“Now do not call me ‘Kitty’ because you are vexed about this!”

CHAPTER XIII.

WHAT WAS EXPECTED FROM MRS. HARCOURT.

WHEN the post arrived at Lawsleigh Vicarage on this memorable morning, there were letters for Mrs. Harcourt, one of which we will take the liberty of perusing :—

“MY DEAR MARY,—

“ I think I never have been more disappointed in my whole life than I am now by your letter. I cannot understand how it has happened that Mr. Hill has not proposed. Had you not better stay a little longer ? I should seriously advise you *not* to give up your chance. I am sure you have a good chance, if you will only seize it ; but somehow or other you always seem to throw cold water

upon all that is said on this subject. If you would but encourage, instead of 'snubbing,'—I daresay you 'snub' Mr. Hill,—that is just as you treated Barbarossa.

"Now, what is to become of you? Do you mean to say you can live upon a hundred and fifty pounds a year? The thing is simply absurd. You cannot, and you know you cannot; and that is an additional reason that you should remain yet longer at Lawsleigh Vicarage, and make something of the chance you still have of marrying Mr. Hill.

"If you were twenty years older—but you are not, and so that is settled. But if you were, you might sink your money, and so get eight or nine per cent., and then you would have an income of three or four hundred a year; but if you are not twenty years older, you cannot. And so I may put aside that plan for your benefit. And now, pray, how are you to live for the next twenty years, until you can sink your money advantageously? You have not given the subject a thought. I dare say not; but I have; and I can tell you, you cannot live—you will die!

“What do you think of this summing up? Does it please you? You have, at least, the consolation of knowing you have brought it on yourself by refusing to marry Mr. Hill, or, at least, by not encouraging him to propose. I know—as well as if I had been present all the time—I know that is what you have done. You did the same with Barbarossa.

“Do you think I should ever have been married to Mr. Curtis, or be the happy wife I am, if I had kept him at ‘arm’s length,’ and not allowed him to propose? I was wiser, I can tell you; and I am rewarded with a good husband, a fine-hearted, noble fellow, as generous as he is good; and I have a charming home, and every comfort, and, I may say, luxury. But, then, *my* manner is encouraging; yours—well, Mary, you really are too proud, and haughty, and hard to please. Barbarossa would have been as good as gold to you, if you would but have given him the smallest encouragement. You really do surprise me; and yet I should not say that; for nothing you do surprises me now. You annoy me. That, at least, is true.

“What is to become of you? I am sure I quite worry myself with thinking about you! And you, of all people in the world, to act in this way! Brought up as you have been, accustomed to every comfort, and every attention. And now I think of it, pray how did you ever manage to get married to Mr. Harcourt? You did not ‘snub’ him, I suppose, or he would have imitated the example of others, and left you to regret your behaviour when it was too late to amend it. It is a marvel to me, when I think of the matter, that you should ever, at any period of your life, have condescended to encourage a gentleman who admired you, and finally allowed him to marry you.

“You had had nine offers when you accepted Mr. Harcourt. I hope he, at least, felt proud of his conquest. I was contented to accept my first offer—dear Mr. Curtis! But some women love to count up the number of their adorers, and some can be satisfied with one. Now you need not purse up your lips, as I know you are doing at this moment, and tell me you never boasted of your conquests. I did not say you did. On the

contrary, I think you were just as silly then as you are now. Love letters, and offers and that kind of thing, are always amusing to read ; but you even grudged your sisters that little bit of fun, and were then as chary of giving us information on such subjects, as you are now of encouraging an eligible offer. We outwitted you then, and knew more than you suspected. I heartily wish some man would outwit you now, and make you marry him, and so give you a home. I only wish this for your own good ; and so you need not be cross at that.

“ However, here I am wasting my whole morning in writing to you ; and wasting my time and my arguments, I know I am ; for you always will have your own way, and so you must have it now. And a pretty way it is, and a pretty pass you have brought yourself to, with all your superior airs and graces ! That is, I mean—‘brought your pigs to a pretty market.’

“ What do you think Mr. Curtis says—‘Sophia, my love, I hope you are not giving Mary a jobation !’ And what do you think was my reply ? ‘I am sure it is no use to leave it for you to do.’

And then he said, 'Poor Mary, don't worry her, my dear!'

"Did you ever!—I worry you! Why, I should never think of such a thing! I know I am angry; and so would any sensible woman be in a like case. I cannot help being angry; it would be unreasonable to hope the contrary. And of course you must expect it—but then, you know, Mary, I am not 'a worry,' nobody can say that of me.

"You know this. I should have been most delighted if you had only accepted Mr. Hill, or made him propose, or done something. But when I look the matter clearly in the face, and remember that you have *not* accepted Mr. Hill or any one, or made him or any one else propose, and that, in point of fact, you have done in this affair as you have done in others, 'nothing,' I feel that you come back 'like a bad penny,' and I am accordingly annoyed.

"It is for your good I am so anxious. What will you do without a home of your own? I declare, talking of 'worry,' I worry myself with thinking what *is* to become of you. But I am wasting my whole morning, as I said before, and

I really have not time to say half that I can say, and must when I see you. I am not sure that I should have written at all, I feel so cross with Mr. Hill, and you, and the whole thing ; but Mr. Curtis asked me to write and tell you, you should be welcome here when you come up from Devon. That is more than I can say. I cannot feel the least wish to receive you after your stupidity. Of course I shall be very glad to have you, and all that ; but you do not deserve compassion, or welcome, after such unwelcome tidings. There. Good-bye ! I wish I was not cross ; but I am. Nevertheless you will come to us ; the carriage shall meet you at Paddington, if you will let us know the day. And now, dear, excuse all my crossness, though you have brought it on yourself, and believe me to be

“Your loving sister,

“SOPHIA CURTIS.”

CHAPTER XIV.

WHICH ACCOUNTS FOR THE ABSENCE OF A QUEEN
ON DARTMOOR.

THE up-train to London was on the point of starting from the station at N——, and Mrs. Hill and Charlie were standing at the door of a carriage in which Mrs. Harcourt was seated.

“And so this is the end of you,” said Mrs. Hill; “I had hoped better things!”

Mrs. Harcourt’s reply was lost to the world, for the train moved on, and Charlie and his wife were left standing on the platform.

“And so, after all the fuss, this is the end of the Widow Harcourt! I shall not easily recover from the disappointment of such a finale,” said

Charlie, when he and Mrs. Hill were again seated in their own carriage.

"Poor thing!" said Mrs. Hill. "I am so sorry to lose her."

"Sorry!—so am I—so is the governor! How grumpy he will be! I say, Kate, we shall not be able to stand Lawsleigh now the fascinating widow is gone; we must cut off home, and take the governor with us and cheer him up. Everything here will remind him of his loss; whereas, if he goes——"

"Nonsense, Charlie! 'Cutting off home,' indeed! Let Mr. Hill be reminded of his loss—the surest way to bring him to reason. And 'grumpy,' too, who cares if he is 'grumpy?' If there is any reason for his 'grumpiness' it is not your fault, or mine. Let him feel the misery he has brought upon himself."

"But, Kate, dear, the governor is not unhappy; by 'grumpy' I only mean——"

"Then I do not care what you mean, Charlie. Why did he not propose to Mrs. Harcourt? No one can give a sensible answer to so reasonable a question."

"Except the governor himself. I see now, Kate, he never had the most remote idea of marriage with any one. The idea has existed in our minds, not in his. We should blame ourselves for forming plans to which he could not consent. We never asked his permission to marry him to Mrs. Harcourt."

"There never was such a chance in this world, for an excellent, kind-hearted, and gentlemanly man, to be made happy by an elegant, true-hearted and lady-like woman. How he has thrown it away!" said Mrs. Hill.

"But he is happy," said Charlie; "he is of a happy nature."

"Then he ought not to be 'happy' without Mrs. Harcourt. I have no patience with him!" said Mrs. Hill.

"I perceive that, my dear; but then since you blame the dear old governor so much, has he deceived the widow?"

"Of course he has. Has he not deceived you and me?"

"We have deceived ourselves. Do you think the widow has deceived herself? I am sure that

dear old governor would never mislead her even a hair's breadth. And then you say—"The governor threw away his chance." And what has the widow done? Has not she thrown away her chance? Why did not she encourage him? He is shy!"

And Charlie laughed a pleasant laugh as he put his horses on.

"You men are the most cowardly creatures," said Mrs. Hill pettishly. "You always throw the blame upon us, whichever way the wind blows."

"But, Kate, we all acknowledge the widow was a 'charming woman.' Now, the governor knows the old song of that title; and he may have felt the advice there given to be good:

*'Don't marry a 'charming woman,'
If you are a sensible man.'*

Depend upon it, the governor was bent upon proving himself 'a sensible man.'"

"Why did he feel bound to make such a fuss with her, poor thing, if he did not mean to keep her for ever?"

"I have not inquired of him," said Charlie.

"I am so vexed!—I am really cross!" said Mrs. Hill.

"And so is the widow," said Charlie. "She tried to look very demure, and natural; and I must say her efforts did her credit."

"Everything she does, does her credit," said Mrs. Hill, interrupting.

"Except running away from the governor. She should have stood her ground. In my judgment, she had very good ground to stay. But then a man may err in his judgment on so nice a point; and you women are such strange creatures, and contrive to mislead us very often. Some time ago I remember describing to you the three widows who were then in the village of Lawsleigh—to wit, the buxom and bad Mason; the aged and good Simpson; the fascinating and handsome Harcourt. But of all the three, I find the bad has the most courage, the good the most faith, and the fascinating the most despondency."

"What a fuss you do make about widows, Charlie! And I don't like to hear Mrs. Harcourt called a widow. I wish you would not give her that title."

"My dear Kate, it is hers by right of her widow-

hood, in common with all womankind similarly situated. But I have something to say on the subject of widows, and so listen, Kate. The bad Widow Mason—I think I have before told you the bad always take precedence—this bad widow dashed a cup of cider in Isaac Watson's face! That was her greeting to him on his marriage. Amiable woman! you will say. Gray misled the governor by telling——”

“Misled the governor, Charlie!”

“Do not interrupt me, Kate, or you will lose the benefit of my learning. And so to return: Gray misled the governor—he told him Isaac and Jacob came rolling drunk out of the ‘Packhorse.’ It is true they rolled out, for Jacob, who was in a state of helplessness, fell down, and Isaac fell over him, and so they rolled out together, and Gray saw them; but Isaac was sober; he had not—to his credit I speak of it—touched a drop of cider in the Widow Mason's house that night; nor can I learn that he has ever been to the ‘Packhorse’ since his marriage, except that once, and that was to fetch Jacob away; nor has he ever been seen in a state of intoxication.”

"Oh! then, Charlie, that will come all right."

"What will come right?—intoxication?—Jacob?
—'Packhorse'?—Widow Mason?—or——"

"Charlie! Charlie! you know nothing vexes me like your pretending to misunderstand me."

"Do not accuse me wrongfully," said Charlie, with a smile; "if you will tell me to what 'that' you allude, perhaps I can agree with you in opinion."

"You know I mean marriage—Isaac's marriage with Mary."

"I know now, Kate; and I may confess to you, *I am* hopeful on the subject of that marriage. But I am on the subject of widows at this moment—let me say my say. To return once again to the bad Widow Mason: she flouts the power of the law to remove her, or to take away her licence. She has grown cunning, and cannot be caught in her transgressions; she grows more and more popular with a certain set, and plumes herself accordingly; she insults where she formerly cajoled; and if the governor do not bestir himself, she will win, for she will leave no stone unturned that will serve her purpose. And so, you see, the bad

widow has the best chance of winning, because of her courage and slyness; for she turns up her eyes and bobs her curtsies to Gray, and thus keeps him in check; for he, too, like the governor, does not like to have to take away the bread from a lone woman."

"These parsons have such tender consciences. Their consciences may be unwilling to take away bread from any one—it would be more becoming to them to charge themselves with the blessing of giving bread," said Mrs. Hill.

"Kate, I never heard you so bitter in my life," said Charlie, "or so false to your real sentiments; for you know full well that the clergy, as a body, are men who are in the daily practice of charity; of charity in all its forms—in the giving of alms, in feeding the hungry, in clothing the naked—of that charity also that, as the apostle says, 'never faileth;' that charity that 'rejoiceth not in iniquity, but rejoiceth in the truth; beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things.' You have made me eloquent, Kate; but indeed such harsh words from your lips took me by surprise. The fact is, you are smarting for the

loss of your friend, and so cannot be reasonable."

"Parson Hill might have given dear Mrs. Harcourt bread for the rest of her life," said Mrs. Hill.

"True, my love," said Charlie, with returning good-humour; "if he had so willed. A man may do as he pleases with his own; and it seems the parson had no intention of giving bread to the handsome Widow Harcourt. But once again, to return—you interrupt me so, Kate, I shall never come to the end of my story. The next on my list of widows is the aged and good Widow Simpson. The governor says she is more than ninety—think of that—more than ninety! Now, she is a pattern to the rest of the world—a little old-fashioned pattern, that will never be surpassed by the newer-fashioned generations that will follow. She is quite sure everything is right; if it is not, it was intended to be; she is sure there is a God and a heaven to go to; she is sure she would never do any evil; she is sure others are like herself, pure in intention; she is one who steers clear of all scrapes, for if, with a desire to shake her faith

in the goodness of others, she was suddenly, by some superior mind, inveigled into a sea of troubles, she would say, 'Him never didn't mean it;' and thus *she* would keep her faith, and *he* would have his trouble for his pains. There is nothing to be done with her but to leave her alone in her goodness. Faith is a mighty rock! And so you see, dear Kate, of these two, one wins by her bad deeds, the other by her good. I have managed to make them both win this time," and Charlie paused in his long speech.

"I suppose you are trying to amuse me," said Mrs. Hill, as she leaned back in the carriage.

"I suppose I am," said Charlie, as he again put his horses on. "Do you mean to say you are not amused? If so, I must try and get over the ground in 'double-quick' time—though that term is not one of the clearest in the world."

Mrs. Hill did not reply.

"Well, Kate, shall we gallop off home, or shall I finish my speech and wile away the time?"

"Oh! pray go on," said she.

"Now I come to the Widow Harcourt, and we can both testify that for the last two months she

had been publicly wooed, publicly courted, by the governor. Why, then, does she privately run away? Answer me that, Kate."

Mrs. Hill remained silent.

"You may look as uncomfortable as you please, and remain as 'mum' as you please, but *I* say she had good ground to stand upon. And you say, or think, she ought to have 'stood her ground;' while she, more learned than either, felt it 'crumble' from under her very feet! There is no denying that, Kate!"

"You know nothing about it, Charlie," said Mrs. Hill, as she turned away her face and pulled down her veil.

"Do you, Kate?" said Charlie in a tone of surprise, as he tried to read the expression of his wife's countenance. "Has she then refused him?—and have you kept me in the dark?"

"Keep you in the dark!" said Mrs. Hill, laughing; "I am not half clever enough for that."

"Oh! trust me to credit you! I know you to be quite as clever as your clever friend the Widow Harcourt, and you would 'hood-wink' any man, if you wished. And so now, Kate, out with it. Do

you surmise that the widow refused the governor?"

"No; since you wish for the truth, he never proposed! After all those undeniable attentions!"

"Ah! unfortunately there is a difference between attentions and intentions," said Charlie, as he allowed his horses to walk slowly up the hill.

"The governor's 'attentions' to the lady were seen and misunderstood by the crowd around—his 'intentions towards her were best known to himself, though the world thought itself very learned even on that head. Well, 'one man can take a horse to water, but fifty cannot make him drink.' And so the governor would not drink—I am sure he seemed sufficiently thirsty!"

"But what a foolish simile, Charlie! Why did Parson Hill praise her so, and admire everything she did, and listen to all she said so courteously?"

"I am not in the governor's secrets."

"But you must think he has behaved ill? I should if he had treated me so."

"You are a wife, my dear, and therefore would

have a right to feel ill-used under such treatment."

"Nonsense, Charlie! You always pervert my meaning. You must think he has behaved ill to Mrs. Harcourt!"

"Pardon me, I have no such thought. I never heard the governor say he wished to marry; and I think he behaved extremely well to Mrs. Harcourt. You lose sight of the fact that she understood him. His conduct to her was the very perfection of the fine breeding and gentlemanly ease of the old school, which conveyed to most women that they were admired—to all, that they were appreciated. Old Harcourt was just such another as the governor; he had that same courtly manner. But, Kate, it strikes me now that the Widow Harcourt is a wise and strong-minded as well as an elegant and fascinating woman. She certainly understands the governor better than any other woman, and it is as certain that she was not misled by his attentions. Remember, Kate, she always said, 'There was nothing between them.' • I quite give her credit now for having spoken the truth; but, 'lookers on,' who are said 'to see more of the game than they

who play it,' seem for once to have been taken in."

"It is a great shame to have misled us all in this way," said Mrs. Hill.

"Nay, nay, Kate; we misled each other. I had somehow taken up the notion that if I had a home of my own, the dear old governor would look out for a mate. I knew how highly he appreciated Mrs. Harcourt, and I thought she was just the woman to make him happy. As I have before said, I married to get out of his way, and now I find I have made a mistake."

"In your marriage?"

"Ha, ha, Kate—you have me there. It was fortunate for me, my love, that my heart was already given, and my hopes of a happy future centred in a union with one who, I am glad to say, does make me happy. Perhaps the vista of my own future helped to blind me to the governor's present. I have been blind."

"Ever since I have known Mr. Hill, he has talked to me about Mrs. Harcourt. Mrs. Harcourt does so and so; Mrs. Harcourt does this and that. She seemed the one only woman in the world who was perfect in his eyes."

"True, Kate, so it seemed to me; but I am now convinced he never had a thought of marriage."

"It is very hard upon Mrs. Harcourt."

"No, no, Kate, I do not see that. She surely understood him from the very first. She is a first-rate specimen of that anomaly in the female sex, 'a strong-minded woman.' Such women are generally shunned and disliked, for they have no feminine foibles to counterbalance their strength of mind, and so to create an interest. But Mrs. Harcourt is the exception that proves the rule. And while I dub her strong-minded, I cannot deny that she is a very amiable and fascinating woman."

"What an uncomfortable drive I have had," said Mrs. Hill, as the carriage stopped at the Vicarage.

"Umph!" said Charlie, to himself, "that is not my fault. I thought I had talked nonsense enough to satisfy any woman; but the fact is, she is put out about the Widow Harcourt; and, for that matter, so am I, and so is the governor, and so is the widow herself! A sad ending to our joyous hopes!"

CHAPTER XV.

OF THE ILLNESS OF PARSON HILL.

THE incidents that occurred in the churchyard of Lawsleigh sunk deep in Isaac Watson's mind. As we have said, he had not comprehended the attack on the sewing-machine, nor did he know that the ignorant villagers had gifted it with strange powers. And also, though he understood that disagreeable things had been said of Mary, he had no clue to the real ill-will, no clue to the fact that she was credited with the wickedness of witchcraft, and execrated throughout the village as one who worked evil upon any one she pleased, by means of the "dumb critter."

Isaac himself was too enlightened to entertain ideas of this sort, as applied either to any piece of

machinery, or to any person. Not so the inhabitants of Lawsleigh. It was to be regretted, in this instance, that Isaac's well-informed mind, and general intelligence of character, unfitted him from estimating their ignorance at its real value. It was this very ignorance that caused them to fear what they could not understand.

The reader must remember that still the "wise men" and "wise women" inhabit the more distant parts of Dartmoor. Still the illiterate villagers apply to these people in times of doubt and difficulty, in times of losses or misfortunes. And the "wise man" or "wise woman," upon the payment of a sum of money, casts the spell, and gives advice.

That they should invest the sewing-machine with a species of diablerie is not to be wondered at. But if Isaac did not know the extent of the evil that existed in Lawsleigh against Mary and the machine, he had seen enough of the jeers and spite of the people to feel that his position and Mary's would be very uncomfortable if this unneighbourly treatment could not be put an end to. He knew—or thought he knew—that it was the loss

of the parson's favour that had so suddenly made all the villagers his enemies. If he had known how greatly he had excited their envy and jealousy in the days of his prosperity, he would not have marvelled at their malice now. But Isaac was too really free from such unamiable qualities in himself, to suspect them in others.

As we have seen, Isaac left his work and tried to lighten Mary's sadness. He made her knitting-needles, exactly the right size ; he found the supposed-to-be lost gauge, he took an interest in the "knitted counterpane," all to make her forget the care that, for the time, seemed to be corroding her mind, and rendering her days unenjoyable. But when he had made his wife and his mother happy, when he returned to his shed, and to his own thoughts, "the glow" faded from Isaac's brow, and he looked well into the subject that gave him so much uneasiness.

And now Isaac determined that he would not lose either "the bells" or "the choir" without a struggle. Nothing but the parson's own orders should take them from him. He must see the parson. And Isaac sighed heavily ; for, if the

parson would not admit him, what could be done? He would see Master Charlie; he would state his case to Master Charlie, and pray him to get the vicar to grant him an audience.

"Master Charlie knows now," said Isaac to himself, "that I do not go to the 'Packhorse,' that I do not drink cider. I had a good talk with him a few days ago, when he came to see after the shoes of his handsome black mare, for he is very particular—as he ought to be—that his horses are well attended to. I could not say as much as I wished to him then, because there were so many standing outside the shed looking on, and listening to every word; but Master Charlie will befriend me if he can, and I must see after him."

The vicar was always just—Isaac relied much on that. He would not take away the bells except for some bad conduct, and that should never be. In like manner, through the well-known equity of Parson Hill, he trusted to retain the choir. With Mary the case was different; her post in the choir was lost with the school—there could be no use in struggling to bring back what could never again be hers!

“But she can sing.—bless her heart!—as well as ever, and her voice fills the church, and rings round and round so as to make the parson look at her; and I dare say, at such times, he heartily wishes he had her back again to lead the choir, and to conduct the school, and to be a comfort to him in the parish—as of course she always was; being able—as she did—to tell him about the behaviour of the mothers as well as of the children. Well, Parson Hill just will not get another such schoolmistress, I can tell him. But then, good man, he knows that.”

And now Isaac made up his mind. He would say nothing to Mary, but he would watch for an opportunity of speaking to Master Charlie, and so get the matter settled before another Sunday. He would not go to the vicarage; he would not give the smallest cause of offence to the vicar if he could help it; he would not do anything that might ever so slightly irritate him. He would “way-lay” Master Charlie, and open his mind to him. And, for the next day or two, Isaac watched here and there, and everywhere he could think of, for Master Charlie; but he only saw him once, and

that was in a carriage, driving the ladies to the station, as he afterwards learned.

The week was almost gone, and Isaac began to think Master Charlie must be quite gone, for he never could set eyes upon him. And so the Sunday came and went, and it was only less disagreeable than the preceding, because the weather was stormy, and the congregation, on coming out of church, were glad to hasten to their own homes. But, if Isaac and his wife and mother had not been insulted, they had been shunned, for not one single person spoke a word of any kind to them.

Early in the week Isaac learned "that Master Charlie and his missus were gone to Paul Tavey!"

Here was an end to his gathering hopes! In the acuteness of his disappointment, Isaac even thought of Mr. Gray as of one likely to befriend him. "The drowning man catching at the straw."

Towards the end of the week, James Marvel looked in at the open window as he was passing by, and said,

"Morning, widdy. And how be you?—and have you heard the news?"

"The news, James? And how be you? No, us havena heard the news."

"The passon be ill."

"The cheery passon, James? The passon ill! Massy me! but that be cruel bad news, James!"

"Bad news, widdy!—it be the worstest news as I have a-heard for many a-day!"

"And what for be the passon ill, James? Be he a-going to die? Massy me!"

"The passon be ill—coz why? All the nice young folk be goned away."

"Goned away?—what! all gone, James?"

"Ay, widdy; Master Charlie and his blithe young missus, and the tother lady as the passon was always a-walking and a-talking and a-riding with—they be all gone, widdy; and I be blest if the passon has a hold his head up ever since!"

"Deary me! So then, James, the cheery passon have a-got his trouble!"

"Ay, widdy, he have—and he will not have a doctor, widdy."

"Doctor! my, James!—be us to lose the cheery passon in us old ages, James?"

"No, no, I hopes not ; I havena heard nothing to that sort, though they does say as him be mighty bad ! And all the blithe young folk gone !"

"And why for don't they come back again, James ?"

"They have a-sended. No, widdy—I means they be a-going to send to Master Charlie. Morn-ing, widdy."

And James Marvel walked away to carry his news of the parson's illness to other cottages. And now Isaac reproached himself for a want of courage, which, after all, had only been an unwillingness to give any cause of offence to Parson Hill.

"I ought to have gone to the vicarage and asked for Master Charlie, only I was so chary of irritating the parson by seeming to presume upon former favours. And now Master Charlie is gone, and the good parson himself ill. There is still—Mr. Gray."

And Isaac sighed heavily.

"Well, well, we must get through another Sunday as best we can—and I have a journey to take

on Monday. But after that, I must come to some better understanding, both with the parson and with the people in the village; we cannot live our lives in this fashion—poor Mary and I. It is clear we shall have no peace till things are put on a better footing.”

“The vicar has sent a basket of vegetables for the widow,” said a servant from the vicarage, breaking in upon Isaac’s reverie.

The widow came forward and made inquiries as to the parson’s illness. But the domestic replied, “That the parson said he was not ill; but everybody at the vicarage knew that he was ill, because he lay in bed very late in the morning, he ate no breakfast, no luncheon, no dinner, although he went through the ceremony of sitting down to that repast daily; that, excepting a cup of tea now and then, and a bit of dry toast, he had had nothing since Master Charlie and his missus went away a week ago. That they were all in a great anxiety at the vicarage, and were talking of writing to Master Charlie!”

This was sad news; but, when the messenger went away with the empty basket, Isaac said,

“God bless the dear and good Parson Hill, and restore him to health and happiness! He never forgets my dear old mother—God bless him!—though he thinks it right not to notice me.”

CHAPTER XVI.

THE STRANGE WARNING.

ON the Monday following the news of the parson's illness, the inmates of the Smithy Cottage arose early, because Isaac was obliged to go to Exeter, where he had an appointment on business. But he told Mary "not to put herself out about the unneighbourly treatment they had met with. As soon as he returned, he would see Mr. Gray if he could not see the parson, and through him learn the vicar's pleasure as regarded the belfry and the choir."

"For," said he "Mary, though we have married, nobody, not even the parson, as I have said before, had a right to prevent us. And as he has always been lenient, even to those in the commission of

daily sins, I cannot think he will be so very hard upon us now, if the matter is put fairly before him. I do not mean that Mr. Gray is the best mediator in the world, but, in the absence of Master Charlie, I have no choice. And then again, my dear, I do not think Mr. Gray will be unjust."

Mary shook her head at the mention of Mr. Gray, but she made no remark ; and Isaac let this slight dissent pass without notice : he had made up his mind to try to make a friend of Mr. Gray.

"I may not be with you again till to-morrow night, Mary, or I may get my business over, so as to reach N—— by a morning train ; and in that case, I shall be home early ; and so keep up your spirits, my dear. No one can be very hard upon us, after they once see we only want to do our duty in our station, and live peaceably with all men."

But Isaac turned away to stifle a sigh, for he knew he had lost the friendship of Parson Hill by his own unseemly conduct before his marriage ; and Isaac only knitted his brow the more sternly,

and sighed the deeper, as he recalled his own wilfulness in going to the "Packhorse" during the time that Mr. Gray took such pains to convince him of his unworthy behaviour.

The morning was dull. All nature seemed drowsy.

"It seems unusually dark," said Mary, as she seated herself at breakfast.

"We are earlier than usual," said Isaac.

In a few seconds after they had assembled, one single loud clap of thunder, without any previous warning, for they had not seen the lightning, broke apparently over the cottage.

"Massy me, lad!—it be awful!" said the widow.

"What a terrible——"

A second report prevented Mary from finishing her speech. This was also one clap, not a roll, of thunder.

"Two of them!" said the widow. "It be the Lord God Almighty as——"

Another single loud clap of thunder again interrupted the old woman's speech; and then she took fast hold of the table with both hands, and

with difficulty placed herself on her knees. Isaac and Mary followed her example, and she prayed aloud :

“The Lord also thundered in the heavens, and the Highest gave His voice—hailstones and coals of fire. Comest thou in anger, O Lord ! To all three does thy warning voice speak. If we have sinned in Thy sight, O Lord ! we humbly pray Thee, of Thy great goodness and mercy, to save us from the consequences of our sin ! Three times have we heard Thy voice. Three times hast Thou warned us of the evil days fast coming to overwhelm us. Lord, we are Thine ; do with us according to Thine own will. And if it please Thee to take us from this earth of sorrow, and trouble, and care, take us, O Lord, to thy blessed heaven. Not for our deservings, but for the sake of Thy dear son. Forgive us, O Lord ; accept our submission. Hearken favourably to our prayer.”

Not to trouble the reader with the Widow's Dartmoor dialect, I have judged it wiser to translate her prayer into readable English.

For a minute or two the trio still remained on their knees in silence, and with heads bowed down.

Then they arose, and attempted to resume the breakfast that had been so suddenly interrupted.

The old woman explained to one at least of her listeners "that this was not a common thunder-storm ; for now the sun sent his bright beams in at the cottage window ; and the breakfast apparatus, and the three seated, were in a blaze of light ; that a single clap of thunder, coming unexpectedly, was always sent as a warning, or foreshadowing of evil to come ; and as there had been three single, distinct reports, so there would be three ' evils,' or one great calamity, in which the three persons sitting together there would be involved."

Mary turned pale, and trembled perceptibly. She had always felt uncomfortable at the thought of Isaac going away even for a day, and now an undefined fear shot through her heart.

"Then I suppose, mother," said Isaac, "this bright sunshine means we shall all come safe out of our troubles, and be happy together?"

"I don't never know about the blessed sun, Isaac," said the old woman ; "but I be learned in they single claps of thunder."

Mary's lips turned white with a curdling dread at her heart; but the old woman did not notice this, and continued,

"There was one comed when my pretty maiden was a-lying in she's bed, with the lad in she's arms, and I tooked the poor bit creature from she, coz why?—I knowed as her time was comed, and it was—she died!"

"Oh, mother! mother!" said Mary.

Isaac, perceiving her emotion, put his arm round her, and whispered he would explain all to her. And when the breakfast was over, he led her aside and said:

"I do not think it necessary to say anything to my mother, because, in the first place, she would not understand, and, in the second, she has already forgotten that such a thing has happened."

"Oh! Isaac! she remembers what happened when you were a boy!" said Mary, reproachfully.

"Yes, my dear, she can recall the events of her early life; but the passing incidents of the present day make no impression upon her. I assure you she has quite forgotten the three claps of thunder!"

"But, Isaac, even you must admit—though I know you will try to comfort me—but even you must admit it was very strange thunder!—so sudden, so loud, no rain!" said Mary.

Isaac pointed to the window-panes, which still showed signs of recent rain, and said :

"The shower was falling even while the sun shone! If we had taken the trouble to look we should have seen a rainbow, and then," said he, with a smile, "mother would have drawn a happy omen."

"But I never heard thunder like that, Isaac!" said Mary. "Such terrifically loud and distinct claps; and only three!"

"Then, if these reports had been more in number, you would have been less alarmed, should you?" said Isaac.

"I think it was odd to be three claps of thunder just over the heads of only three people! It seemed, as mother said, one for each of us!"

"Well, Mary, now I must say I did think you were wiser than to fall into such errors," said Isaac, with a little reproach in his tone. "But tell me, then, my dear," added he, in a more gentle tone,

softened by her evident distress, "do you think we three were the only living creatures who heard that thunder? There was the whole village of Lawsleigh. What would the inhabitants say to your three single, loud, distinct claps?"—unconsciously Isaac spoke impatiently. "And then, Mary, there was the good vicar, quite alone, and ill; what idea did these three reports convey to him? I suppose even mother would say one would be enough for the parson, now that he is by himself!"

"I never thought of that!" said Mary, some of her terror subsiding. "But, at all events, Isaac, I never heard such thunder in all my whole life!"

"That may be, and I cannot explain all the causes to you now, Mary, because I must set off on my journey. The plain way to account for these three discharges, and no more, is, that the balance between the electric clouds was restored."

Mary stared, evidently not comprehending. Then she said, with some degree of awe in her manner:

"But they broke just over our heads, Isaac, all three of them!"

"How many seconds of time do you think there were between the first discharge and the second?"

"Seconds of time!—seconds of time!—why, six or seven, perhaps more!" said Mary."

"And between the second and third?"

"More—more, Isaac; half a minute, at least."

"Then, Mary dear, assuming that the first discharge was immediately over this cottage, by your own shewing the second was a mile and three quarters off, and the third much more distant! Sound travels at the rate of a quarter of a mile in a second of time!"

"Isaac!" said Mary, almost breathless with surprise, for such knowledge had not fallen in her way, "why, how wonderful!—how very wonderful!—how can you know this, and know it for certain?"

"Mary, my dear," and Isaac spoke in a very serious and impressive manner, "will you believe me there is nothing in the thunder this morning but the natural consequence when two electric clouds meet?—I will show you my books on scientific subjects when I come back, and explain all to you."

The mention of books was enough to Mary. All her former confidence in Isaac's talented mind returned ; she knew, in her own small experiences, that books were authorities she might safely rely upon, and she said in a glad voice,

"Oh ! yes, dear Isaac, I do quite believe you. But how very clever you are !" And she gazed at him from head to foot with a proud and gratified look.

"Well, never mind my cleverness ; only remember, you have no cause for fear. Mother has already forgotten all about it, so she will not return to the subject."

"And you, my treasure," said Isaac, solemnly, as he clasped her in his arms for a parting embrace, "do you keep your mind from superstition, and your heart free from anxiety, for I shall soon return."

And Isaac set off on his journey ; but somehow even he could not shake off a feeling of sadness that was both discouraging and disheartening.

CHAPTER XVII.

OF THE VISIT OF THE WIDOW MASON AND JANE SANDS TO THE SMITHY COTTAGE.

AND Mary was alone. It seemed so to her now that Isaac was gone. She set herself to her daily work, however, and did not allow her mind to dwell on the thunder—Isaac had entirely dissipated her fears. The old woman went about the cottage as usual, attending to her morning duties, and accidentally set down on the sewing-machine a jug she had brought with her downstairs. In her failing sight she had not perceived that this was the dreaded machine, and as her hands were full, she placed, as she thought, this jug on a table standing there. What was her astonishment to see it topple over, fall to the ground, and break in

a thousand pieces. She had placed it on a corner of the box or case that covered up the machinery, and thus the jug, insecurely placed, fell. But she did not understand it had been her own fault, and amid her loud lamentations for the loss of the jug, she mingled many regrets that "the critter" had ever been brought into the house.

It was now that Mary discovered the old woman's terror at its supposed diablerie; and it was now that she had some clue to the words she had heard spoken a week or two ago in the churchyard. Mary's hair almost stood on end with fear, as she ascertained, bit by bit, that the old woman's opinion agreed with that of the Widow Mason, and of many others, in the supposition that Mary was a witch. Poor Mary! she had never heard of "the Lancashire witches," or she might have had some comfort under that title. She had only read of the witches of bygone ages, and knew that some had even been burned to death!

We cannot say that in these enlightened days Mary contemplated such a fate for herself; but she certainly did not feel easy under the title of "witch!" We have before intimated that Mary,

if she spoke but little, and sometimes did not appear to advantage, was, upon the whole, a sensible and rightly-judging young woman. On this day, during Isaac's absence, she particularly wished to use the machine; the positive attention she must give to it, to work well, would draw her from herself and her own melancholy thoughts, and the long and lonely hours would thus appear to pass away the quicker.

And now, though she had discovered the old woman's strange antipathy to the machine, she thought it would be wiser to try to conquer her prejudice by a daily use of it, than, by giving way, render Isaac's superb gift useless, and deprive herself of a great help in her sewing, as well as of a great amusement. Whether Mary acted in this instance with her usual judgment we leave to the decision of our readers. Certain it is, she set to work in her customary manner, and the old woman in due course of time took her knitting.

Mary did not notice the furtive looks of the widow as she now and then raised her eyes from her own employment to steal a glance at the dreaded "critter." Mary had purposely placed

herself by the window that looked into the garden, in the hope that at that distance she should not only not give offence, but probably remain unseen and unheard; and thus placed, if her thoughts were at any time withdrawn from her work, they only fell back upon Isaac, his absence, his probable return, his steadfastness—for the moment she had forgotten his breach of faith—his kindliness and goodness, and her own great love for him. The widow and her timid terrors were soon far away from Mary's attention in the present moment, or her calculations in the future. But the widow, on the contrary, the faster the machine seemed to work, and the louder its tric-trac, the greater became her hidden fear. It is true she continued to knit, for still the same words haunted her—

“Satan finds some mischief still
For idle hands to do ;”

and she certainly felt herself in greater danger when sitting idle, than when, with her knitting, she was keeping time with the machine. She made no visible demonstration of her agitation, beyond the movement of her lips in the verse she kept repeating over and over again, as if it were a

charm to protect her from evil, and the furtive glances she occasionally gave to Mary.

It happened at this time that the Widow Mason, in her stroll round the village, retailing the news brought into the "Packhorse" by men crossing the moor, met Jane Sands opposite the smithy, who was returning from the school, where she had been summoned by Mr. Gray, on account of the continued ill-behaviour of her pet child Joe—"the cherubian Joe," as the vicar had called him. And here the two women stood for a gossip in the street, Jane telling the widow all that her poor boy had been doomed to endure in the hands of that "there coorit—rabbit him!" added she, as she clenched her fist.

They had not stood talking many minutes before they saw the Widow Simpson seated at the window, and they both simultaneously spoke of the unusual expression of her customarily very placid face. They saw her lips move, as if she were muttering to herself, and her eyes extend themselves, and stare, apparently, into vacancy, while her aged fingers plied her knitting-needles with a rapidity that, to the looker-on, seemed marvellous,

but that to the old woman herself seemed to be a race she was running with the dreaded "critter," and the winning of which her excited imagination and real ignorance compelled her to attempt.

"Look to she!—look to she, Jenny, 'ooman!" said the Widow Mason.

"She be most mazed, to my thinking," said Jane.

"Most mazed!—that witch will kill she!—kill that poor old body! Here, Jenny, 'ooman, let us go up to the window."

The Widow Mason and her companion went close up to the cottage, and they stood gazing at the Widow Simpson sitting knitting, with every symptom of terror expressed on her countenance, close to the window; and at Mary, plying her skill so quietly, and so unconscious of intruders at the other window—for the windows were opposite each other, looking back and front.

"Us will speak to the widdy, Jenny," said the Widow Mason. And she accordingly placed her stout person close to the casement, and shouted out, "Open the window, widdy!"

The poor old woman, startled by an unusual

and unexpected sound from her dream of horror, screamed aloud, as she dashed her knitting on the floor, and started to her feet.

“Open the window—open the window!” said the Widow Mason, trying to arrest her attention, and so far succeeding as to cause the old woman to turn and look at her. But she did not attempt to reply to the Widow Mason’s request by opening the window.

Mary had left the machine, and was now standing by her side. She had no more inclination than the old woman to open the window; though, for that matter, she did not even know that the Widow Mason had dared to make such a request, since she was not one of the frequenters of the smithy cottage, nor one whom Mary ever willingly noticed.

The two women on the outside, seeing that the window was not opened to them, went round to the cottage door and let themselves in.

“I be glad you be come,” said the Widow Simpson.

Her terror was so great, she was glad of any change. But if the old woman had been in her

customary quiet state of mind, she would have been one of the last to welcome either the Widow Mason or Jane Sands.

“Mother!” said Mary, in a tone of surprise, “I am with you, why need you fear?”

The old woman was very pale, and trembled so as to require support. She leaned upon Mary, for she could not stand alone.

“Ma-ary, I was afeared as the ‘old one’ would take us;” and then she began to weep in a demented sort of way, as she turned to the two intruders and said, “May be as the Lord sendd you to I to keep the ‘old one’ at a distance, as he shouldna touch I!”

For, in the confused state of her ideas, and in her personal dread of the machine, she had not lost her belief in a superior being, or her reliance on his power.

“The ‘old one!’ bless us and save us, Jenny, woman! The ‘old one!’ Hark to she, Jenny!” said the Widow Mason.

“Mother! mother!” said Mary, speaking with some asperity, as the ignorance of the old woman displayed itself to her.



"You be a dear good old widdy!" said the Widow Mason, coaxingly. "May be as I can help ye?—tell I what be your trouble?"

"The 'old one' be come to us," said the old woman; "him be there!" and she pointed to the machine.

"Oh—h! Jenny, woman! hearken to that! There be the 'old one' a-seated hisself on that there table!"

"I have a-heard on it," said Jenny. "It be she"—pointing to Mary—"as have a-bringed him!"

"Ay, ay," said the old woman, not comprehending the drift of Jenny's speech, but understanding that she meant to point out the machine as belonging to Mary. "Us be clean in the hands of the 'old one'!"

"Mother!" again interrupted Mary, in great astonishment, and some anger, "what are you saying?"

"Allow she to tell the truth," said Jane Sands, menacing Mary with her clenched fist.

"Tell truth, Molly, and shame the devil, I have a-heard say," said the Widow Mason, laughing.

"It is only a sewing-machine," said Mary, to the women, for a strange sensation of helplessness was fast creeping over her, and, almost unconsciously, she tried to propitiate them. "It is only my sewing-machine, dear mother; there is no harm in it."

"No, Ma-ary, no," said the widow, kindly; "only I be most mazed, and I don't like to go near it!"

"Poor old widow! most mazed! Hearken to that, Jenny, woman; and it be like enough she be most mazed."

"Been't you 'shamed of yourself, mazing a quiet body that fashions?" said Jane Sands to Mary.

"You have no business here, Jane," said Mary, with some spirit. "Neither have you," said she, to the Widow Mason; "and I request you will both leave my cottage."

"Oh—h! you be mighty grand, you be!" said the Widow Mason; "but I be a-going to speak to this here old widow. Jenny, 'ooman, stop you there."

The old woman had not understood what had

been said ; she had been busy collecting her needles and wool, and knitting.

“ Widdy, I comed to see how you be,” said the Widow Mason, artfully taking advantage of the old woman’s temporary loss of power.

“ And I be very glad to see you, and thank you kindly, and sit you down. Ma-ary, the Widow Mason will stop and cheer us up a bit now, as Isaac be not here.”

Mary said nothing. She turned away with a sinking heart to put away her work, and keep all her attention upon her enemies.

CHAPTER XVIII.

OF THE MINERS AT THE SMITHY COTTAGE.

“**A**ND where be that there big Isaac?” said Jane Sands; “why for does he let his old mother be feared out of she’s witses?”

“Isaac, Isaac,” said Mary, hesitating to proclaim his absence.

But the old woman said,

“Isaac be gone to Exeter—he will come back to-morrow, and then us will be safe.”

“Safe, mother—you are safe now,” said Mary, though her voice faltered as she thought that Isaac could not be with them till the morrow, and that these women would not have dared to press their presence upon her if she could only have said, “Isaac will be here in a few minutes.”

"Oh-h-h! him be a-gone to Exeter—umph!" said the Widow Mason, bridling and sneering, and inwardly glad to hear that Isaac was away, because this fact, combined with the old woman's weakness, gave her present power over Mary. "Him be a uncommon big man," and then, turning to Mary, she added in a sneering tone, "Do he take a drop of cider now and then?—do he, spite of your white face?"

Mary's face might well be called white. She had always had an indistinct fear of Jane Sands, even while surrounded by the powerful protection of the vicar; and she was no stranger to the slights and scoffs of the Widow Mason towards herself. And now, therefore, to have these two women invade the privacy of her own cottage in Isaac's absence, and take part with Isaac's mother against herself, however wrongly, was enough to send the blood from her face, and to fill her mind with anticipated dread in the present, and to banish hope for the future. She felt the taunt conveyed by the widow's last words, perhaps even more than her uncomfortable position at that moment; for it so sadly confirmed her own strong

suspicion that Isaac did drink cider, did go to the "Packhorse" occasionally, unknown to her, for she never could do away with the fact that there was at times a smell of cider about him—faint, it is true, but still there it was.

And so Mary stood silent and pale in the presence of her two most malicious foes. The Widow Simpson raised her head when she heard a hint given of Isaac's liking for cider, and the Widow Mason replied to her look of inquiry by saying,

"Ay, ay, widdy, Isaac likes his drop, there be no denying that—forbye, him be uncommon sly! —uncommon sly!" And she peered out of the corners of her eyes to see how her shafts struck: and being satisfied that they had done their duty and made Mary wretched, she tried her skill upon something else. "Jenny, 'ooman, it be not fair to leave this here poor old widdy all by she's self, that there white-faced doll will poison she afore Isaac comes back, or, leastways, put she in that there worry with that 'critter,' as it been't safe to leave she, Jenny. I be minded to stop by she's side, and take care of she, poor thing. I say, widdy," continued she, arresting the old woman's

attention, who had been quietly sitting resting her head on her hand, and not noticing what was said, "mayhap, widdy, it would be a comfort to you if I just stop and take care as the de'il doesna catch you?"

"Ay, ay," said the old woman, eagerly; and clutching hold of the Widow Mason's clothes to prevent her from rising; "sit you still. It be a awful thing, widdy, to know as the wicked one, when he roameth the earth, can just shut hisself up in a thing like that," pointing to the machine.

"Ay, bless your heart, so it be," said the Widow Mason, taking one of the old woman's hands, and keeping her attention entirely upon herself. Then turning to Jane Sands, she continued, "And, Jenny, 'ooman, don't thee stop no longer. Go thy ways to the 'Packhorse,' and tell them as I be here, a-doing of my duty, and a-taking care of the good old Widdy Simpson from the demoneses and the de'il hissen."

"Ay, and from that there witch, as would poison she," said Jane, clenching her fist at Mary, whose thoughts, upon the Widow Mason's mention of

cider, had strayed away to Isaac, and who had been occupying herself in the back part of the cottage by gathering up the different pieces of her work, and who had not taken notice of the conversation going on. "And if so be as my Joe be a-comed from his work to his dinner, him shall just get the men all together, and they will gie you a good ducking in the swamp, you witch!" and with this blessing, Jane bounded out of the cottage.

Mary stood transfixed. It is needless to say she was now even more terrified than the poor old woman had been. She had heard and read of lawless deeds done by cruel men in remote districts. She knew these two women were more bitterly inclined towards her than any others. She saw herself in their power; that power unconsciously aided by the Widow Simpson's ignorance and terror. Isaac was absent; the parson was no longer her friend.

She had only one source from which to expect help in time of need. If her position were so lonely, and man so hard upon her, she had no helper but God. Inwardly she raised her heart to Him, and prayed Him to bestow His mighty pro-

tection and care upon her, deserted of all others. And though this short prayer comforted her for the time being, and gave her courage to stand and endure what might fall upon her, if He willed it, it did not take away the horrible dread of approaching evil, or the certain knowledge of the brutal treatment she was likely to receive at the hands of the miners on Dartmoor, if Jane Sands put her threat in execution.

As these thoughts filled her with terror and dismay, she continued to gather her work together, and at length turned to put away her sewing-machine. But the Widow Mason called out in loud discordant tones—

“Let he alone!—let he alone! Don’t go for to raise the de’il in my presence.”

Mary held in her hands the box or cover that protected the machinery from dust; but the old woman said,

“Let she do it—let she. Coz why?” and she made the Widow Mason stoop while she whispered, “when she covers up the ‘critter,’ him be quiet. Him never makes no noise when he be covered up, only, if you touch he, him may break the ‘clome’

all to pieces." For she remembered the jug broken only that morning.

As the old woman ceased speaking, Mary put the cover over the machinery, and left the machine standing in its accustomed corner of the cottage, close to the window.

Mary seated herself at a distance from the old woman, and her companion the Widow Mason. She argued the matter silently, as to whether she should defend herself from the evil insinuated by this woman—for to speak to Isaac's mother on the subject she saw was useless—or whether she should let them have all the talk to themselves.

"She will only insult me the more if I do tell her I am innocent of any evil intention. It is not so much that she thinks me wicked, as that she rejoices in her own power to harm me, and has a keen pleasure in seeing me unhappy. I do not know what I have done," continued she, as the tears rose unbidden to her eyes. "And how I do wish Isaac had never left his home! And the parson! Oh! if he would only see me for one minute, I am sure he would never let that bad woman——"

But Mary's reverie was interrupted by a loud laugh from the Widow Mason, and the room seemed suddenly darkened ; and as Mary looked up to ascertain the cause, she saw her in the act of opening the casement, and a crowd of rough-looking men standing outside, and completely blocking out the light from the window.

Hardly had Mary realized these facts, before the door of the cottage was opened rudely, and Jane Sands came in, saying, in harsh tones, as she rushed up to Mary,

"I have a-got they men. Here be my Joe ; and Paul Read, and Jack Brag ; and——"

But Mary heard no more. She staggered back, and, taking hold of the table-part of the machine, just preserved herself from falling.

Presently she recovered the powers of her mind sufficiently to understand what was passing before her eyes.

"Her be a witch—be her !" said one of the men at the window. "Us must burn she !"

"Yes ; her be a witch—a right down bad witch !" screamed the Widow Mason. "Her have most mazed this poor old body. I be stopping by she's

side to comfort she, poor thing!—been't I, widdy?"

"Yes, you be; and thank you kindly," said the old woman, looking wonderingly at the crowd of men.

"Where be she to? Be she a-standing there?" and the man pointed to Mary.

"Yes," said the Widow Mason. "Her have a-tooked hold of the infarnel 'critter.' Coz why? it be him as be shut up there, as helps she to witch folk."

"Lor' bless you, widdy!—an 'infarnal critter!'"

"Oh! Paul, lad, her be a fine bad 'ooman, her be—a-going to poison this here poor old widdy!"

"Poison the old widdy! Then where be that there big Isaac as marries a white-faced witch, and allows she to poison his own mother?—where be him to?"

"Him be to Exeter, Paul," shouted Jane Sands.

"Them big men most times be big cowards," said Jack Brag, who was a little dirty-looking man.

"Hark ye, lads!" shouted Paul Reade—"hark to I! Her be a witch!—her have a-witched folk!—her be a-going to poison the good old widdy!—"

her have a-made the passon ill!—her have a-sended Isaac out of the way!—and her have a-got up this here row!”

“Let us swamp she!” shouted a loud voice.

“Let us have a bonfire and burn her,” said another.

“I am not a witch,” Mary attempted to say, as she clutched the table firmly; but, to her added horror and dismay, her voice had lost all sound; her lips moved—but this was all.

“Her be a-talking to the ‘critter,’” said Jane Sands, who seemed to take a strange pleasure in watching Mary’s terror, as it was increased by the circumstances that had so quickly surrounded her.

The men and boys now crowded into the cottage. Mary, pale and trembling, still kept her place by the machine. She was thankful to see that all kept at a respectful distance from herself, though they eyed her with looks first of curiosity, then of spite and ill-will.

“Well, widdy—and so you have a-gotten the de’il in your house?” said Joe Sands.

“I be a-feared so—it be a awful ‘critter,’ surely,”

said the Widow Simpson, as she stared upon the strangely intrusive crowd, without in the least comprehending the reason of the intrusion.

"It be feared you be for your life, widdy—eh?" said Jack Brag, as if he would convince himself of the truth of the Widow Mason's accusation.

"Yes, yes—I be feared," said the old woman, innocently supporting the Widow Mason against Mary.

"Be you feared of she, widdy?"

The man paused; but the old woman did not understand him. She had no fear of Mary—on the contrary, she was much attached to her. She did not comprehend the spite and malice of the people, or even know that Mary was in danger, if not of losing her life, at least, of very rough treatment, at the hands of cruel, hard, and ignorant men. She looked up inquiringly at the man, and did not speak. The man nodded to his companions, as much as to say,

"She be feared of she, but she be feared to tell us!"

And then he turned again to the widow, and said,

"Us be going to burn the 'critter,' widdy!"

"Burn it!" said the widow, starting up with singular energy. "And blessings on ye!—and blessings on ye!"

And she stretched out her arms and moved her hands, as if she would have given her blessing separately to each one of the many there, so heartily did she appreciate and approve the good action they were about to do.

"Mother, mother!" said Mary, with passionate emotion forcing out her voice, "don't be so foolish, mother—it cannot hurt you!"

"Hark to she!" said the Widow Mason, "a-taking part with the de'il hisself!"

"Now, lads, don't be feared for this here row!" said Paul Reade, who was a tall, ill-looking man. "It be *she* as have a-got up this here row, and she be a witch! Us will have a bonfire—eh, lads?"

A great shout arose at this proposal, and poor Mary put her arms round the box on the top of the sewing machine, to save herself from falling.

The crowd went out of the cottage to make

preparations for the bonfire, and Jane Sands clapped her hands and rushed up to Mary as she said,

“ I telled you so !—I telled you so ! They will burn the de'il with fire and brimstone, and stick you heels uppermost in the swamp ! ”

CHAPTER XIX.

WHICH TREATS OF THE ESCAPE OF THE WITCH.

MARY had looked on with the utmost sense of horror at her position ; her tongue clove to the roof of her mouth. She saw men in the prime of life, filthy in appearance, with pipes in their mouths, unsteadily reeling about her cottage, touching all things that she valued, polluting with their fetid breath the very air she breathed, and looking more like demons than men. She heard the clamour of tongues outside, and she felt that the fate of the sewing-machine was sealed. She clung to it as if she could save it, or as if her strength could protect it from their fury ; and yet, amid all her thoughts, she acknowledged to herself the uselessness of contention, the feebleness of her power.

"Lots of wood, lads; now lend a hand!" shouted Jack Brag; "come, come, us will pull down the shed."

"Look, Jack, there be another shed, a betterer than Isaac's lumbering shop, and it be made of betterer wood," said Jane Sands, pointing to the one so lately erected for the protection of Mary's furniture.

"What be that there shed for?" said one; "us will take a look inside."

The words were scarcely uttered before the staple was wrenched off, and the door opened.

Jane Sands was the first to gratify her curiosity, and see what the shed contained; and when she recognised many articles of Mary's furniture she had formerly seen at the school cottage, another implement of power seemed suddenly to come into her hands.

"Jack, lad, look you—these be she's bits of things, all covered up this fashions. My! it will burn well, lad, and save a mint of trouble."

"Ay, ay, Jenny, 'ooman," said the man, as he pulled out a chair, which in its delicacy and fashion—though only a common chair in ordinary

use in other parts of England—struck him as something totally unlike what he had ever seen before. “It be a uncommon pratty chair, Jenny, ’ooman—it be most a pity to burn it,” said the man.

“Why for does she have such chairs? Can’t she sit she’s self on stools like to other bodies quite so good as she?” said Jane.

“I tell you it be a pity,” began the man.

But a rough and strong arm from behind seized the chair, as he said in loud, indignant tones,

“Pity!—pity!—what be you about, lad? Why, she have a-poisoned the old Widdy Simpson; witched poor Peter Barker for to kill his wife; witched the passon ill; raised the de’il in the village of Lawsleigh, as never had the de’il in it before; and she have a-got up this here row. What be you about?” added Paul Reade, for it was he who had seized the chair. “Us must burn all she’s bits things, and swamp she!”

Poor Mary, who heard every word—for the reader will remember she was standing by the window looking into the garden, and the new shed

was built close by—Mary thought, if that was her character in the village, she did not much wonder at the treatment she received now, or was likely to receive at the hands of these ignorant and cruel men. But she had not much time for reflection, for, to her amazement and horror, she heard the wood crackling in the front of the cottage, and knew that the men had begun already to put their hideous threats into execution. She saw the flames—through the opposite window—begin to rise; she saw her own furniture carried out, and piece by piece heaped on the pile; and what tended more than all to increase her regret, and add to the hopelessness of her position, she saw the good old Widow Simpson calmly looking on; and she heard the Widow Mason urge on the men to destroy as much as they could.

The old Widow Simpson, it is true, stood calmly looking on, but she did not see that the huge bonfire, which was every moment becoming brighter and increasing in size, was fed by Mary's furniture. All that she saw was the blaze that was to consume the "critter."

And now Mary began to think it might be

better to try to escape, rather than to stand there quietly awaiting the approach of bad men to drag her to a horrible death! She looked round at the crowd on all sides of the cottage, and saw but little chance of success; but yet she determined to make the attempt. She thought within herself, "They will not hurt the poor old mother," and her eye fell sorrowfully upon her, as she saw her now sitting a little apart from the window, rocking herself to and fro, and the large and fat Widow Mason apparently trying to soothe and protect her. "Yes," resumed Mary, "I feel sure they will not harm the old woman; but they will burn the sewing-machine, and murder me if I stay—I must try to get out of the window."

She watched for an opportunity, for with the constant rush into the cottage of new-comers, all wishing "to get a good look to that there witch," she saw there would be some difficulty. After a few minutes of intense anxiety, she thought she perceived a favourable opportunity, and stealthily getting upon a chair, she mounted into the inner shelf, or window-sill, and there stood ready to jump into the garden. It was only about

three feet, nothing of a height to terrify her; but at the corner of the shed, assisting the men and boys to purloin furniture, she saw Jane Sands, and she knew that to be seen by that woman making an attempt to get away, would only subject her to a stricter surveillance, and, in all probability, to greater miseries.

She drew back, therefore, still standing on the sill, and when Jane left the shed, loaded with fuel for the bonfire, she made a spring into the garden. She was too late. She had been seen by the Widow Mason, who immediately raised a hue and cry after her.

“Be that there witch to be let loose on all the world? Here, you, Jack Brag, go after she, and bring she back!”

Mary did not hear all that the Widow Mason said, she only knew her attempt at escape had been discovered, and she felt how quickly her enemies would follow, and how feeble were her own efforts in her own cause.

We have before had occasion to mention the natural spring of water flowing from a rock at the back of the cottage. The cliffs or rocks that extended in

a sort of chain down the length, and at the back of the village, rose to the height of many feet above the dwellings generally. Just where the water burst forth, the cliff projected some four or five feet, leaving, at the back, a hollow or cave, dreary, damp, and dripping with moisture, the entrance to which was concealed by the branches of trees that drooped in wild disorder.

Mary heard the shout of voices as she dashed past the spring, with an intention of running down the village. She saw the men draw back from the window that had favoured her flight, where they had eagerly clustered on the first alarm, and she knew, almost by instinct, as it were, that she and her pursuers from different routes would meet at the garden gate. Irresolute for one second, she knew not what to do; but seeing the garden side of the cottage entirely deserted, and feeling satisfied that the men had seen her making for the village, and therefore were likely to pursue in that direction, like a hunted hare she doubled on her own footsteps, went past the spring of water once more, and hid herself in the hollow caused by the jutting out of the rock.

The men and boys rushed out of the smithy cottage, as she had foreseen, and ran some distance down the village street before they discovered they were on a false scent.

"Her goed these ways," said a boy.

"Her be a witch," said another. "Her have, maybe, rided away atop on she's stick!"

"Witches can't never witch theyselves away from honest folks, never!" said Paule Reade, in a loud, stern voice. "Witches be always catched, and witches be always swamped, or, eithermore, burned with fire and brimstone!"

"And shall us catch this here witch, Paul?" said a very little boy, with eager looks.

"Ay, lad, us shall be sure to catch she, though she have a-hided she's self; us must hunt the garden."

And they turned to do his bidding.

Mary heard the steps of the crowd approaching, as she stood trembling in her dripping and dreary hiding-place. She heard the oaths and foul words of the men, as they grumbled at the loss of their prey; and she shudderingly felt, if she were discovered, she had not made her case better by at-

tempting to get away. Then she heard the loud coarse voice of Jane Sands saying,

“Us will find she, dead or 'live ! Her be a witch, but us will find she. And if us finds she dead, or if us finds she 'live, us will stick she heels uppermost in the swamp. My !” and Jane laughed a fiendish laugh.

This woman, so dreaded by Mary, came nearer and nearer. Mary heard her voice louder and louder ; and shiveringly she crept closer still to the damp wall, and went farther back in her disagreeable hiding-place.

She heard Jane stop at the spring, and drink, and continue her foul language to the boys, and add to her horrible threats against herself. She heard her dash the water in the faces of the men and boys, and laugh her demoniacal laugh at their annoyance. She heard her tell them to peer about into holes and corners, and look well for the witch.

“Coz why?” shouted she. “A witch can't put she's-self a-inside of a hazel-nut !”

And then Mary heard the trampling of many feet in the garden, and knew that the search had

commenced in earnest. She concluded Jane Sands was heading the troop, who, to use Jane's words, were "to leave no stone unturned 'till they had found she, dead or 'live."

But no—Jane Sands stood by the spring, close to Mary's hidden retreat.

CHAPTER XX.

WHICH TREATS OF CARRYING OFF THE CRITTER,
AND FINDING THE WITCH ALIVE.

BUT though apparently so many had gone from the work of destruction at the smithy cottage to pursue Mary, there were still plenty left to add fuel to the fire, and to get all things in readiness for the burning of the machine, and the carrying off of the supposed witch to Cranbourne Pool,* and what they termed “duck” her—that is, plunge

* “This pool is, in fact, a great bog, which in winter is converted by the rains into a lake, of an oblong form, about 150 feet in length, and 80 in breadth. The water in it gushes from a bed of gravel, beneath a stratum of peat bog. Situated about the centre of Dartmoor, at a considerable elevation amongst the hills; twelve miles from Moreton-Hampstead, eight from Tavistock, and six from Oakhampton.”
—*Moore's History of Devon.*

her into the swamp, and keep her there until she was exhausted ; then bring her out, and let her recover. After her recovery, plunge her in a second time, and, on recovering from that, a third time.

With very little trouble, the men and boys managed to raise an excellent bonfire ; and amid the cries of the crowd, Mary could discover that every now and then something better than usual had been thrown into the flames.

But at length a silence seemed on a sudden to fall on the numbers there ; and Mary could not, from her hiding-place, tell what had caused it. Had help arrived ? Her heart almost ceased to beat with the intensity of her attention to catch a new sound—a strange voice—a voice of authority. No !

She heard the murmur of the crowd begin again, and unconsciously she heaved a deep sigh—for up to this time she had scarcely dared to breathe. Jane Sands heard the sigh. But she restrained all movement on her own part, and stood listening, if by chance another sound would guide her to her prey.

The hubbub in the front of the cottage began again. The men and boys had evidently given up the search in the garden, and Mary hoped Jane Sands had gone away with them. She had supposed Jane had been as active in the pursuit as the others, and did not know she still stood by the spring.

"The garden is so still and quiet," thought she. "I will just peep out, and see if there is any one near."

She began to put aside the branches which hung down from the cliff, and concealed the hollow at the back of the spring. But the first movements of her hand, by disturbing the foliage, aroused Jane's attention. The woman's eyes flashed with a fiendish pleasure, as she foresaw Mary was about to put herself in her power. But, like a cat, craftily pretending to sleep, the more easily to catch her victim, so Jane, by keeping perfectly still, lulled the alarm of the desolate Mary, in order, again like the cat, to start into active life at the critical moment, and seize her prey.

Mary moved noiselessly, as she supposed; but

her enemy was on the alert. Mary removed branch by branch skilfully and quietly—she could now see into the garden.

Jane had foreseen that Mary would look well around ere she ventured forth ; and, gloating over the fulness of her own power, she suffered her to enjoy these moments of hope—by keeping herself perfectly still and in the shade—that she might the more intensely feel her misery when caught in the very moment of fancying herself free.

Mary looked round and round—she saw no one. She heard the noise now increasing in the front of the cottage—now sullenly subsiding ; she heard the crackling of the wood ; she saw the lurid light of the great fire throwing its red hues on all things near, and she made up her mind. Breathlessly, with the twigs firmly clutched in her hand, she stood listening for the slightest sound that would betray the presence of anyone. All was still in that part of the premises ; she concluded, therefore, she could cross the garden in safety and escape, unseen by the crowd in front of the cottage. She gently pulled aside the only branches that now concealed her in her retreat, and, dis-

entangling herself from them, sprang hastily forward, and screamed aloud with redoubled terror as she felt herself caught in the strong arms of Jane Sands.

"And you be here, be you, a-giving us the trouble to run after you? Comfortable, eh?" added Jane, in a sneering tone, "comfortable in that there dark hole? My! you be fond of hiding you self, you be!"

Imprisoned as she now felt herself, Mary no longer resisted; she was already very faint and very weary. The future seemed so terrible—life itself, under the anticipations of that terrible future, of no value.

"If I could but die where I now stand," thought she.

"You-u—you-u put my boy Joe a-top on a stool in your school, did you?" And the woman held her fast with one strong arm, and lifted the other menacingly against her. "Then I be a-gb'ing to put you a-top on a stool in my school, I be." And she beckoned to the men in the distance to come to her aid. "Here be the witch," said Jane, as the men approached.

"Lor' bless us, Jenny, 'ooman, how skilled you be, surely—so you have a-found she, and 'live?"

"Come, come along with you," said one of the men, pulling Mary roughly by the arm; while Jane Sands walked by her side, and gratified her malevolence by her rudely taunting language.

"Would you gie I the penny as my boy Joe gived you to your school, when you had a-got a school?"

Then she stooped her tall person, and whispered,

"Gie I the penny, and may be I could get you off. Eh, Molly?"

Mary heard not this mockery. The shrinking sense of helplessness in the hands of Jane, followed by the shivering sensitiveness of degradation when churlishly pulled by the men, swallowed up all other feeling. She felt herself dragged along, and hurried round the corner of the garden in front of the cottage. The immense crowd, the enormous fire, the shouts that filled the air—of all this she was conscious—conscious in a dulled and crushed acceptance. She felt her brain grow

confused, her respiration difficult, her sight gone. She knew no more.

But we must return to that part of our history when Mary—in her hiding-place—knew that the noise round the bonfire had abruptly ceased, and hoped that some powerful help had arrived. We must account for this cessation of amusement to the numbers assembled there, and apparently making so great a jollification of the destruction of property belonging to another.

The scene in the front of the cottage had been progressing unfavourably for Mary's property; and the fire was pronounced sufficiently large to burn the de'il himself!

Paul Reade, amid the shouts of the populace, entered the cottage to fetch the "critter."

"Where be the 'critter' a-hided?—can you tell?" said he, to the Widow Mason.

"There, Paul, lad, a-standing by the window."

"Where to do you mean, widow? It be the 'critter' as I be comed for."

"Eh, lad?—what be about, then? There—that

there little table!" said she, pointing to the machine.

"That there bit on a table, widdy?" said the man in a loud voice of astonishment; "that bit of a thing to make such a big fuss!" added he, in a jeering tone, and pointing at it contemptuously.

Then he took hold of it with one finger and a thumb, and said,

"Come, pussy, pussy, pussy!" as if he thought it so small, so light, and of so little consequence, that he need not take any trouble to move it; but the table remained stationary. "Come, come," said the man, turning his back to it, and taking hold of it with both hands this time to draw it gently on.

The table did not move.

The man's mirth and jeers were suddenly stopped. The crowd of eager lookers-on through the window and in the cottage, all anxious to see the dreaded "critter" pitched into the flames, suddenly hushed their clamour, and sound and motion seemed abruptly suspended.

Paul Reade was not a man to be daunted by a trifle. He now turned round once more, and took

a good look at the table; then he turned to look at the myriads of eyes—for alarm multiplies objects—extending themselves in a terrified stare as they watched him. Paul ascertained that “the table,” as it seemed to him, was not fastened to the wall; he saw that it was small, and apparently lightly-made—how then could it be so sturdily immoveable? He had not seen the machinary under the box at the top, and thus had no clue to its real weight. It had been accredited with supernatural powers, and his untutored mind admitted to himself that “the de’il” was stronger than man.

Paul Reade turned pale. The hitherto awed silence of the crowd now was broken by the sound of footsteps stealthily attempting to leave the cottage. Some walked away immediately to their own homes, with blanched faces and fear in their hearts, telling all who would listen to them that Paul Reade, who was known to be so tall and strong, could not, with all his strength, move a tiny little bit of a table—-not so big as a three-legged table in ordinary use—because the de’il himself was shut up in a box at the top, and his huge cloven feet were under the table, plain to be seen

by all men. It was during Paul Reade's unsuccessful attempt to move the machine, that Mary had so ardently hoped help had arrived.

"At it again, Paul!" shouted a voice from the outside of the window.

The speaker felt himself comparatively safe, and able to run away if anything occurred to warrant his doing so; but he had nevertheless a strong curiosity to see, as far as he could, how his neighbour would fare in his tussle with the "de'il."

"At it again, Paul!" shouted the man.

Paul eyed the machine steadily, but looked irresolute.

"Paul Reade, you be a big man—and Joe Sands, you be a big man," said the Widow Mason; "and then there be Jack Brag and his brother."

The men clustered together as the widow mentioned them by name, but stood listening.

"If so be as you four strong men was to just catch a hold of the 'critter' to the four corners, and so to put your biggest strengths, my belief as you four would be too many for the very 'de'il hissen!'"

The men looked at each other, but did not speak.

"And be you four big cowards?" said the widow.

"Just you be quiet, widdy," said the voice from the window; "my belief as you four could beat the 'de'il' all to shivers! You be no cowards—no, no!"

"Us could but try," said Paul Reade.

And the men, flattered by the opinion of the looker-on at the window—and to his great satisfaction—agreed to try their strength with the "critter." The men cleared away any obstacle standing near to the machine, and each placed himself at a corner.

"Now mind you be ready with your biggest strengths," said the voice at the window, "and I will gie the word. One—two—three-e-e!"

The four men exerted their utmost strength at the same moment, and up went the machine, unnaturally light this time. A sewing-machine can be lifted—according to its size—by the moderate strength of one man. But the concentrated efforts of four strong men, as they are needless, so they

reduce its supposed weight to insignificance. But there was no insignificance here! Its very imponderability now, contrasted so forcibly with its enormous gravity but just before, that the four strong men trembled as they stood. They looked in each other's faces, and saw the blanched visage, awe-struck eye, and hair standing on end!

The man at the window shouted aloud, the people remaining outside of the cottage—for the inside had been cleared—cheered heartily, in anticipation of the approach of the “critter,” and the four strong men, in spite of the fear curdling at their hearts, took courage, and moved away with the machine. A deafening shout arose from the assembled crowd, when the “awful critter” was seen outside the cottage door; and the shout was made much more jubilant as Jane Sands, with the “live witch,” made her appearance from the garden at the same time.

CHAPTER XXI.

OF ISAAC WATSON'S RETURN HOME.

WE have seen that Isaac set off early in the morning of the day in which the events last related occurred, to keep an appointment in Exeter. He had been unable, when he went away, to specify the exact time of his return, for although the means of travelling easily and speedily had been greatly facilitated by the opening of the railway to N——, yet as he could not foresee how long he might be detained in Exeter, he had given Mary to understand he probably should not be at home until the afternoon of the morrow.

But, contrary to his expectation, his business was over on the Monday, and he was enabled to take the last train to N——, arriving there, it is

true, very late, after twelve o'clock at night. He had then ten miles to walk across the moor, but he thought it wiser not to start off at that hour, but to rest a short time, and still set off so early as to surprise Mary and his mother by knocking them up at half-past five in the morning.

It was a lovely morning. Isaac saw the moon just drop behind a light cloud, and the stars twinkling high up in the heavens. As he neared the moor, and saw the Tors gradually coming into view by the light of the moon—no longer hidden by a cloud—and throwing an oblique light on distant objects, his mind was attracted by the beauty of the scene, and home and Mary banished for a time.

Isaac, among his reading tastes, had picked up a slight knowledge of the stars, and in his walk across so large an open space as Dartmoor, had an opportunity of seeing to advantage such constellations as were then visible. His heart was light, for he had kept his word to Mary, and not touched cider in his absence. His mind was easy, for he had transacted the business he went upon greatly to his own satisfaction ; and thus, as he stepped

quickly on, he felt in the mood to enjoy the works of God ; for, with a devoutly grateful heart, he acknowledged His great goodness and many mercies to himself, and prayed Him to watch over and ever protect Mary, his dear wife, and his mother and himself, from all future evil.

And so Isaac counted the stars. "Perseus and Auriga in the zenith," said he, "and the old bear coming up to windward. I wonder if Mary knows anything about the stars ; she ought, considering she was the schoolmistress."

Here Isaac gave a little sigh, for he remembered she could no longer lay claim to that title, and that her deposition from the chair of office was a great grief to her. But this recollection faded from his mind ; he turned again to contemplate the heavens.

"Aries, Taurus, Gemini, Cancer, and the head of Leo—it is indeed a night for brilliant stars ; the nebulae in Cancer very distinct. I must walk out with Mary in the winter evenings, and if she does not know the constellations, I will point them out to her. No one on Dartmoor who can read ought to be without some knowledge of the stars, because

there is such an enormous space, without any interruption, of high buildings, or objects that ordinarily shut out the heavens from us."

And then his thoughts reverted to Mary, and he pictured her happiness on seeing him return so unexpectedly early.

"She cannot expect me at this time of the morning—that I am sure of;" and Isaac chuckled at the thought of her pretty surprise and pleasure. "I should not wonder if she makes me some nice coffee; and I shall be very glad of it, after my long walk. How bright Orion is! And how grandly Sirius scintillates!" And after contemplating the heavens for a few moments longer, he turned again to earth and to Mary. "I will build two nice rooms, dear Mary! I will make her so comfortable, though it is such a pity that the parson casts us off—I must see him or Mr. Gray," and now Isaac sighed heavily. "However, I live in hopes of better days, though I have got such a bad name now, one would think it must wear out in time. 'It is a long lane that has no turn.' 'Rome was not built in a day;' and if Mary has not got the school, she has got a home of her own—bless

her!—that I shall be proud to make better every day of her life.”

And thus Isaac whiled away the time, and piloted himself by the stars, for the moon set in the first hour of his walk, and then the moor was in darkness. When day began to break he enjoyed the wonderful tints that heralded the approach of the sun, but he quickened his pace, for now he was near his home.

“They will be stirring before I get there, if I do not mind what I am about. Why, the sun rises at six, and I see he will soon be above ground. I had intended being earlier ; I must have walked slow—but here I am !”

And he joyfully ran round the corner that led into the village street, and close by which stood the smithy.

Poor Isaac ! If he reproached himself for having walked slowly, he found he had arrived too soon for his own peace of mind.

“What on earth is all this rubbish ?” said he, as he saw the remains of the large bonfire that had been there the day before.

There was not light enough for him to distinguish

objects clearly, but he saw there was an unusual heap before the door of the smithy, and almost blocking up the high road.

"I cannot think what can have been the matter. Let me see—it *is* October," said he, doubtfully—"it is not the fifth of November; and if it were, they have no business with a bonfire there, for I do declare it seems to me, in this uncertain light, as if there had been a bonfire, and a very large one!"

The sun rose on the other side of the house, so that Isaac was comparatively in darkness; but he went on, now moodily enough, and entered his shed. Strange marks of violence were visible to his experienced eye, even through the darkness. He was so struck by these unusual appearances that he went on, without turning into the cottage, through the back sheds into the garden; and there, by the light of the rising sun, he saw that the door of the shed he had so recently built had been carried off; the furniture, which he had left so nicely packed up, almost all gone, and what was left in strange disorder and confusion, many articles lying about defaced and broken.

"What on earth can have been the matter?" said he wonderingly, as he gazed around.

Then he saw that the casement looking into the garden stood open; and putting in his head he called out—

"Mary!—Mary!" Then he said to himself—"They must be up, or the window would not be standing open."

He hastened to enter the cottage. The door stood ajar, and the large room bore the marks of the crowds who had trampled upon its clean floor yesterday. The furniture was in disarray, but though these things struck Isaac painfully, as indicative of some evil having happened, he was very far from imagining the truth.

Now he rushed up stairs, loudly calling "Mary!—Mary!" Alas! no voice replied to his summons. The bedroom that he and Mary occupied remained in the primitive neatness in which it had been prepared the day before. The bed had not been slept in. The room evidently had not been used on the past night.

A strange awe seemed to creep over Isaac, and the silence of the cottage was appalling. Isaac no

longer called "Mary!" He mutely gathered one by one the proofs of her absence, and stood horror-stricken.

"Mother!" said he softly, as if he feared the sound of his own voice. And then, as it were, recovering himself, he laughed a hideous laugh, as he reeled out of the room into the next, saying, "She is with mother—of course she is! What a fool I am! Mother! mother!"

But his dismay and astonishment may be better imagined than portrayed, when he saw that room also in the same neatness in which it was customary to prepare it in the morning of the day; and when he understood at a glance that the bed had not been occupied for the night, and that neither his mother nor Mary was there, Isaac's knees knocked together, his muscles relaxed their tension; large drops of perspiration gathered on his brow, and rolled down his cheeks unheeded.

He had seated himself on the bed to save himself from falling, and now he perceived that the casement here also stood open. With difficulty he dragged himself to the window, the more easily to ascertain what had caused the confusion

he had seen on his arrival at the smithy ; and as he stood there gasping for breath, at the weight of these accumulated horrors, he saw distinctly now, now that the sun had risen sufficiently, the remains of a large bonfire. To his horror and indignation, he could not mistake the broken pieces of furniture that he recognised as Mary's, lying here and there among the rubbish ; and—" Did he see aright ?" thought he, as he gazed with eager eyes and compressed lips, his tall person leaning far out of the window—" Did he see aright ?—did he see needles glittering in the light ?—and reels of cotton, such as belonged to Mary's sewing-machine ?"

As quickly as his consternation and terror would let him, Isaac turned and staggered downstairs ; and as he passed through the large room, he saw the machine was not standing in its accustomed place ; then he rushed out to examine the remains of the bonfire. Yes ; he could no longer doubt—reels of cotton, scissors, needles glittering here and there in the sun, riveted his attention. In his despair, Isaac gave one long, loud moan. He gazed around—tossing his arms wildly—not knowing where to go, or what to do.

At length he saw in the distance a child coming from the village towards the smithy ; and he knew her to be Phœbe Morris, taking a can of milk to a cottage in the lane.

He awaited her approach ; but when the child saw who stood there, looking more like a mad than a sane man, she slackened her pace, and seemed afraid to come on.

CHAPTER XXII.

HOW ISAAC WATSON LEARNED THAT THE WITCH
AND HER FAMILIAR SPIRIT HAD BEEN BURNT ;
AND HOW MASTER CHARLIE FOUND ISAAC LYING
IN HIS SHED, DRUNK, AT SEVEN, A.M.

“COME along, Phœbe, come along,” said Isaac,
impatiently.

But as the child still hesitated, he tried to soften the tones of his voice, for he felt conscious they were unusually loud and unsteady.

“Come, Phœbe, come—I am Isaac Watson—do you not know me?—poor child, how should she?” muttered he *sotto voce*, and then he added aloud, “I shall not hurt you.”

Thus encouraged, the child walked on.

"Can you tell me what has been done here?" said Isaac.

"They made a big bonfire to burn she and the 'critter,'" said the child, looking terrified.

"To burn what?" roared Isaac, with startling energy.

"The 'critter,' as witches folk."

Isaac did not understand.

"What 'critter' do you mean?" said he.

"Why, they have a-telled I as there was the witch, and the witch's familiar; and as the witch have a-poisoned the old widdy, and so they have a-burned she."

"Child! child! do you know what you are saying?—will you drive me mad?" said Isaac, as he seized hold of Phœbe's arm, and shook her roughly.

The child screamed with pain and fright. From a neighbouring cottage a woman peeped out. Seeing the child held thus by Isaac—for in his agony he knew not what he was doing—she rushed forward to rescue her.

"Isaac, Isaac Watson, been't you ashamed of yourself?" said she, liberating the child.

"Where is my wife, Kitty?—where is my wife?—where is my mother?" said Isaac, in the loud accents of despair.

But as Isaac's grasp on the arm of Phoebe Morris had—unconsciously to him—been very tight, he had left the marks of his fingers on the child's flesh, and the woman's attention and sympathy were both given to her, and she took no notice of his words. While Isaac, maddened with the strange appearance of things, and with the harrowing suspense, now seized hold of the woman, as he once more shouted out,

"Where is my wife?"

"Oh-h! Isaac, let I be!" screamed the woman.

"Hollo, there!" said the gruff and hoarse voice of a man who came hastily out of his cottage to his wife's assistance; "if so be as you havena got a wife of your own, you better let alone other folk's wives."

"It be a shame on you, Isaac," said the woman, as she escaped from his grasp; "why for do you be a-hurting womens and childrens this fashions?"

"I do not want to hurt you," said Isaac.

"It be not my fault what they have a-done to she and to the old widdy, so you let alone I; and my man was to work to Bovy, so he, good man, hadna got nothing to do with the witch, neither the 'critter.'"

Isaac did not understand; he put his hands to his brow and stood silent.

"It be that 'critter' as have a-done the work," said the man; "us doesna like such queer things here to Dartmoor."

"But can you not tell me what has been done?" said Isaac, entreatingly; "and do tell me where is my poor mother?—where is my wife?" and the pathos in Isaac's voice touched the woman, for she raised the corner of her apron to her eye, as she said,

"Poor Isaac!"

But the man took hold of her, and said,

"Come along, Kitty, come along," and they turned to re-enter the cottage.

At the door the woman called out,

"Come in here, Isaac, come in here and have some breakfast."

But Isaac heard not; he leaned against the wall

of the smithy, and seemed almost unable to stand. After a few minutes he raised his head, and said,

“Ay! I must try to reach the vicarage—the parson will know what all this means; I am sure I do not, for I am almost out of my senses.”

He turned into the shed with the intention of taking his hat; but the excitement and painful suspense of the last half hour had been too much for him—he fell all his length, and lay there unconscious of anything.

Presently, as the village awoke from its sleep, first one and then another passed by the smithy.

“Isaac lying there drunk! It be early in the morning for that!” said one.

“Ay, ay—dead drunk!” said another, as he passed the first speaker and went on to his work.

But as it happened, there was one strolling leisurely along on that early morning, his dark hair blown about by the breeze, his hands in his pockets, and the pleasant smile on his lip, proclaiming to the simple villagers the presence of “Master Charlie.” He cheerfully whistled as he went the favourite air from the last new opera, and turned the corner of the street to pass by the smithy.

"Hollo!—who lies here?" said he, starting back as he saw Isaac lying in the shed.

"It be Isaac Watson, sir," said Phœbe Morris, now returning with her empty can.

"Isaac Watson!" said Charlie, in a voice of dismay.

But he went up to the still body lying there, and, looking at the pale face, he stooped down and began chafing Isaac's hands, while Phœbe Morris said,

"Please, sir, Isaac Watson be drunk! He have a-hurted my arm."

But Charlie heard her not, for he said, in a commanding voice,

"Run, child, run to the vicarage for brandy, and help—help—hollo!—run!—fly!"

And, as his tones became—unconsciously to himself—louder, he was heard by those in the nearest cottages, and two or three came hastily out.

"Run to the vicarage, good woman, and bring me brandy; Isaac will die!" said Charlie in his alarm, as he bolted out his words in hot haste.

He seated himself on the ground and took Isaac's head upon his knee, telling the standers-by

to chafe his hands while he loosened his cravat. He placed his hand upon Isaac's heart—for he shewed no sign of life—his eyes were shut, his mouth and teeth rigidly closed!

“Bless me!—bless me!” said Charlie, as he redoubled his efforts to recall him from the sort of swoon in which he lay.

“Him have a-been most mazed about the poor old widdy and his wife,” said the woman who had spoken to Isaac before he fell.

“And no wonder!” said Charlie.

But he did not know that the woman had left him in strange ignorance of what had really happened.

“Will they never bring the brandy?” said Charlie.

CHAPTER XXIII.

WHICH TREATS OF "DUCHESS" AND HER RIDER.

BUT we left Mary in the hands of rough men, with Jane Sands walking by her side. And as we have said, the people shouted :

"Let us gie the 'witch' a warming before us swamps she!" said Jane Sands.

"Ay, ay, Jenny 'ooman ; us will set she a-top of the 'critter,' and——"

"And that be just where I think she ought for to sit," said Jane.

"Ay, Jenny, and let she have a lick of they flames ; and after that us could carry she off and swamp she in Cranbourne Pool!"

"Hark ye, lads!" said Paul Reade in a loud voice, and the crowd hushed its clamour, and

listened. "If you sticks she a-top of that," pointing to the machine, as he wiped the perspiration from his brow, "you won't never get she off again, my belief! That be a 'infarnal critter,' I can tell you."

And the man shrugged his shoulders and shook his head, as he remembered the extraordinary freaks—in his comprehension—that it had been guilty of.

"If you let she sit she's-self a-top of that 'critter,' my belief she will ride off clean away, and us couldna catch she again to swamp she."

A loud groan rose from the crowd.

"You hold she fast, Jack Brag, whiles us gets the 'critter' into the fire."

And the tallest and strongest from the crowd came forward, as they said, to help to pitch the 'critter' into the flames, when suddenly a man on horseback came full speed round the corner.

So little prepared were the horse and his rider for the enormous fire burning in front of the smithy, and so fast had been the gallop with which they had approached the bend in the road, unsuspecting of evil, that the noble animal rushed im-

petuously, as it appeared to the lookers-on, almost into the flames.

"Soho! Duchess, soho!" said her rider, drawing his rein tightly, as the beautiful creature reared with her fore feet over the fire! snorting, terrified, and restlessly moving her hind feet, without, for a second or two, attempting to turn away. Her rider kept his seat, even with his own head in reach of the forked tongues that played so luridly and venomously around.

"Duchess!—good Duchess!" said he, trying to turn her head from the fire, which, when he at length accomplished, she brought her fore feet heavily to the ground, and in her next movement stepped upon a burning brand! The animal plunged violently, snorting and trembling perceptibly, while her rider tried to soothe her with his voice.

"Him be Master Charlie!" said Jack Brag to Jane Sands.

The woman did not wait for another word; it was now her turn to run, and to try to get away from the scene of ruin, of which she had been the instigator. Mary heard the words; she saw the

woman turn away; she knew the men no longer held her.

"Master Charlie!" her lips murmured, but no sound came forth; "save me, save me!" and she fell fainting and exhausted. Meanwhile Paul Reade and Joe Sands had gone to Master Charlie's assistance; and, holding his beautiful mare while her master dismounted, Charlie's first words were expressions of gratitude to the men for their timely interference.

"Thank you, Paul; thank you, Joe;" his first act to examine the legs and feet of the mare.

"Poor Duchess!—I hope she is not much hurt!—but what is the matter?"

The men's faces had a hard and sallow expression, and they did not answer his question.

"Isaac! Isaac!" shouted he, as he rushed up to the cottage. "And who is this poor creature?" added he, looking down upon Mary lying in a swoon—her hair hanging loosely, her clothes in disorder; he did not recognise her.

"Isaac! Isaac!" again he shouted; and then, as Isaac did not reply, he turned to the men and said, "Where is Isaac?"

"Well, Master Charlie, it be all the 'critter' and she," said Paul Reade, in a deprecatory tone; but Charlie had again stooped to examine his mare's fore legs, and did not hear the words or notice the man's manner.

"I wish Isaac would come," said Charlie. "Isaac! Isaac!" and Charlie again walked up to the cottage window. "But what is all this about?" And now he turned to look at the fire, for his thoughts had been, for the few minutes in which he had been present at this scene, taken up with "Duchess," and the injury she might have received.

"And who is this?" continued he, as he stooped to look at Mary. "God of heaven! is this Isaac's wife! What have you been about?—why don't you help her?—help! help!" shouted he in at the cottage window.

He turned to ask for assistance from the great crowd that was there on his arrival; but all were gone. The fire blazed and crackled, and put out its feelers for more fuel; and in the distance he could see the late disturbers of the peace getting away from the scene of their wickedness by twos and threes as fast as they could. Charlie did not

understand this. He rushed up to the cottage-window, and once more called "Isaac!"—there he saw the poor old woman weeping and lamenting as if she were demented; and the fat widow Mason by her side—also weeping!—but hers were "crocodile tears."

Charlie took in at a glance the strangely disordered appearance of the interior of the cottage. But all that he could understand, as he looked around, was that something very wrong must have happened.

His own consternation, on riding as it were into the very midst of the flames, had subsided through his fear that the mare was injured; and this dread had absorbed his attention, and prevented him from realising, to a certain extent, the facts before his eyes! And though, before he reached the smithy, he had seen the light caused by the flames, and heard the uproar of the assembled people, he had not had the smallest suspicion of a riot. The village of Lawsleigh had always been one of the most peaceable on the moor.

Master Charlie had concluded the villagers were making merry. A cold shudder ran through his

frame as the truth seemed to burst upon him, that this was not the scene of a merry-making. The downcast and guilty looks of the two men convinced him he had rightly surmised. These things Charlie understood in a second or two, though they take some time to write; and then he set himself to work to recover Mary from her faintness.

"Bring water," said he authoritatively to the Widow Mason; and he returned to Mary, and kneeling by her side, tenderly chafed her hands.

"You see, Master Charlie, she be a witch?"

"A witch!" shouted Charlie in such a voice of dismay as to make Duchess start, and keep the men fully employed in holding her, and trying to soothe her fears. "Give me the water, woman! Gently—she is beginning to revive!" said Charlie to the Widow Mason.

"She have a-poisoned the poor old Widdy Simpson," said Joe Sands, hesitatingly.

"She have a-raised the de'il in the village, Master Charlie," said Paul, sturdily.

"She have a-got up this here row," said Joe Sands.

"She and that there 'critter' have a-done all the mischief, surely," said Paul, his tones becoming louder.

Charlie heard every word. He took no notice of the men ; their own words, intended to defend themselves, had convinced him of their desperate and lawless conduct.

When Mary began to revive, Charlie turned to the men, and said,

"Joe Sands, take Duchess to the vicarage—lead her carefully—and tell Marvel to send the carriage here immediately. Mind what I say," said Charlie, his tones unconsciously very stern. "The parson is ill. See Marvel; and tell him I want the carriage. And you, Joe, remain with the mare until I come. How is she now?" said Charlie to the Widow Mason, who was attending to Mary's recovery.

At this instant Paul Reade attempted to steal away unperceived by Charlie; but he was prevented from exercising his wish.

"Paul," said Charlie, "you seem to have been present at, even if you have not participated in, a great deal of evil. Suppose you finish your

day with a good action? I may want your assistance."

The man stood sheepishly looking on.

Mary, when she recovered from her swoon, could not stand without assistance; but she was able to tell Charlie that Isaac was away, and that she did not expect him to return till the afternoon of the next day; that the people of the village had credited her sewing-machine with supernatural powers, and herself with witchcraft; and that but for his opportune arrival, the machine would have been destroyed, and she herself have suffered worse than death at the hands of these cruel men and women.

No words can paint the horror and consternation of the young man when Mary finished her slight description of the troubles of that day. Charlie eyed the large strong man standing there with looks of anger and contempt. And when the carriage arrived, he had Mary and the old Widow Simpson placed comfortably in it; for he saw, by the ruin and desolation around, and by the unprotected state of the two women, that it would be unsafe to leave them in their own cottage, unless

Isaac were there to protect them. He had sent for the carriage on purpose, though neither Mary nor the widow knew this.

Charlie said but little ; but his lips were firmly pressed together ; and Mary told Isaac, when they met again, "that Master Charlie's face was so white and so stern, she was half afraid of him, only he spoke so kind to her."

CHAPTER XXIV.

IN WHICH MASTER CHARLIE "TWITS" ISAAC
WATSON.

THE good old vicar of Lawsleigh, Parson Hill, was ill in bed, and Charlie had ridden hastily over from Paul Tavey to inquire for him, which accounted for his very welcome presence on passing the smithy at the critical moment.

The Widow Simpson and Mary were placed under the care of the housekeeper immediately on their arrival at the vicarage, and treated with all due kindness. The sewing-machine was sent for. Mary had the gratification of receiving it uninjured. The loss in needles, scissors, &c., was trifling, and Mary told the housekeeper "that the sight of the machine in such good condition—only

slightly defaced by the marks of dirty hands—more than anything else contributed to make her feel herself again.”

The Widow Simpson was profuse in her “blessings” on the head of Master Charlie. She had never understood that Mary was in danger from the people until a minute or two before Charlie’s arrival, when she accidentally saw her come round the corner of the cottage from the garden in the very rough hands of a miner. And though the reader may remember that the sewing-machine, in the hands of the four men, made its appearance on the scene of action simultaneously with Mary, the widow saw it not. All her thoughts were at once riveted on Mary, and the wicked Widow Mason prevented her from rushing excitedly out to help Mary, and try to save her.

“Ma-ary! Ma-ary!—they shall not hurt a hair of she’s head!—oh—h—Ma-ary!”

When, therefore, on Charlie’s arrival, Mary was saved, the widow’s gratitude could not be restrained. She entirely forgot the dreaded “critter,” with the obliviousness of age in the past, when strongly absorbed in the present moment; she

remembered nothing but that Mary was restored to her, and her fondling and caressing of Mary, while she heaped blessing after blessing on the head of Master Charlie, made even him feel doubly glad that he had arrived in time. An outburst of gratitude is precious to us all. With thankful hearts Mary and the Widow Simpson slept that night in peace and comfort, and when they arose in the morning they thought and talked of nothing else but of their rescue on the previous day by that kind Master Charlie, and of Isaac's expected return.

Not to keep our readers in unnecessary suspense, we may mention here that Master Charlie succeeded in recovering Isaac from the state of insensibility in which we left him, and that he too was brought to the vicarage by the kind-hearted young man. And, curiously enough, while Mary and the Widow Simpson were enjoying their breakfast in the housekeeper's room, and longing for Isaac's return, and counting the hours until he might reasonably be expected, Isaac himself, under the same roof, was in the dining-room with Master Charlie. And this same Master Charlie said :

“Come, Isaac, old fellow, your troubles are over now. Sit down, and get a hearty breakfast—hush, if you please—not a word!” and Charlie held up a prohibitory finger.

George came in at the same moment with hot cutlets, &c., &c., and when he left the room Charlie continued—

“Not for one second shall you see your wife or your mother until you have eaten a hearty breakfast. Come, sit down!” and he helped Isaac to all that was necessary, while he added: “They are very well—thank God!—as I told you; and after your long walk, and all else, which we will not talk about now, I insist upon you eating a good breakfast. Do you like coffee, Isaac?” said Charlie, with a merry twinkle of his eye, for Charlie had had a talk with Mary, all of which has yet to be recounted to the reader—“eh, Isaac?—will you have coffee?”

“Like coffee!—yes, God bless her! I do, Master Charlie!” said Isaac, recalling the wet night that Mary had made coffee for him, and, thinking of Mary, he said “God bless her!”

But Charlie said, “God bless her!—oh, Isaac!

what nonsense!—why, coffee is ‘it’—not ‘her.’”

“It was Mary, Master Charlie, God bless her!” said Isaac, “that I meant.”

“But you did not tell me, Isaac—how was I to see into your thoughts?” said Charlie, as he poured out the smoking coffee.

But while Isaac and Master Charlie are enjoying their morning meal, we wish to make known to our readers that, on the recovery of Mary and the Widow Simpson from the fatigues of the day, Charlie made a point of going to the housekeeper’s room, and of gathering from Mary as much information as she could give on the subject of the riot. Mary only knew one of the men—Joe Sands. The miners generally were a lawless and very ignorant set of men. The very nature of their employment prevented them from being known to their neighbours, their work being fully as much at night as in the day. When they worked in the night, they were in bed all day; but the miners as a body of men kept well together and supported each other, although they were not well known to their immediate neighbours. But Charlie gathered enough from Mary, in addition

to his own observation and knowledge when he arrived on the scene of action, to make him declare, in her presence,

“He would have the whole village either pounded into mince meat or roasted alive!”

He congratulated Mary on the evident reform in Isaac’s habits. Mary looked up timidly, for she wondered in her own mind if Master Charlie knew of that night that Isaac went to the “Packhorse” to fetch Jacob! Charlie saw she was not quite at her ease, and he then said,

“Isaac told me the other day that he had never entered the ‘Packhorse’ but once since his marriage, and that was to fetch old Jacob Smerdon away. And also that he had never tasted cider or any other kind of fermented liquor since the night he had accidentally entered a gin palace in London. Is it so?”

“If Isaac says so, sir,” said Mary, blushing, and not liking to hint at her own knowledge to the contrary.

“You see, Mary,” said Charlie, “that Widow Mason is the most spiteful creature. I quite wondered to see her in your cottage this morning. I

should never have suspected you of liking such a woman!"

"Indeed, sir, she never was in my house until this very day," said Mary, with energy; "and if Isaac had been at home, she would not have ventured to intrude upon me. She and Jane Sands came in without being invited."

"I will have them well 'pounded' with the rest of the village—eh, Mary!" and Charlie laughed. "But, as I was saying, that widow is the most spiteful creature the world ever saw; it was spite when she dashed the cider in Isaac's face, and all over his clothes!"

"Dashed cider in Isaac's face, sir!—why, when was that?"

"What! did not Isaac tell you? Why, on that night he went to fetch Jacob. She could not prevail upon Isaac to drink, and so she waxed wroth," said Charlie.

"Oh! that night, sir, when he went to fetch Jacob!"

Mary spoke in rather joyous tones.

"Yes, she threw the cider all over his clothes!"

"Oh—I am so pleased," said Mary, and then she repeated her words as she clasped her hands together, "I am so glad—I am so pleased!"

"What!" said Charlie, in some surprise, "pleased at your husband's discomfiture!"

"Oh—h—I do not mind that one bit—not one bit!" said Mary, joyously.

Charlie now fixed his eyes reprovingly on Mary, and stood in mute astonishment!—and he looked so like Parson Hill—at those times that he too reproved without speaking—that Mary was suddenly recalled to herself.

"You see, Master Charlie," deprecatingly, "I could smell the cider about Isaac, and so I thought—"

"Oh—h—h—you thought he had been drinking!"

Now Charlie's tone was reproachful, and Mary felt this: she did not reply.

"Did you accuse him of evil practices, then?" said Charlie—and his tone was not pleasant—"did you open your mouth wide?" added he, looking fixedly at Mary, "did you taunt him with breaking his word!"

"No, sir," said Mary, subdued as much by

Charlie's manner as by his queries, which were painful to her. "It is true, I did think he had broken his word, but I kept my sorrow to myself, and did not remonstrate with him, and Isaac never knew that I had suspected him. And now, sir, that I know he did not break his word, I cannot help being glad!"

Mary finished her sentence in a tone of apology, for she was conscious she had allowed her delight in Isaac's innocence to be expressed enthusiastically. But Charlie folded his arms and leaned his back against the wall, as he stood for a minute or two thoughtfully looking at Mary, before he said,

"Have you had any other cause for suspicion of Isaac's breach of faith?"

"No, sir, never."

"He makes you a good husband?—eh?"

"Yes, sir—very—very indeed," said Mary, blushing and looking up brightly. "He is most kind both to mother and to me, and there never was but that one thing on my mind against Isaac; and now that you tell me, sir, even that was an error, I cannot be happier, that is, I mean when he comes back."

And Mary heaved a sigh as she thought of the troubles of that day.

“And you make him a good wife?”

Again Charlie looked like Parson Hill, and Mary cast down her eyes, as the thought quickly obtruded itself that she should never again meet Parson Hill's kind eye bent approvingly upon her.

“I try, sir,” said she, with a little sigh.

“And you take his pipe away, because you know the ‘Total Abstinence Society’ will not even allow smoking!”

“Will they not, sir?” said Mary, looking puzzled. “Then Isaac cannot belong to that, because he always has his pipe.”

“Oh-h-h—he always has his pipe!—lucky dog!—and you give him water to drink?”

“No, sir—he never drinks water. Once, when he was very tired and wet”—and Mary heaved a sigh as she remembered that all the care he had taken on that wet night had been worse than useless, for her furniture had been destroyed in the riot that morning. “Once, when he was so wet and tired, I made some coffee for him, and he said he liked that better than cider!”

"Coffee!—well done!—why, if we do not mind what we are about, Dartmoor will become civilized in this 'fast' nineteenth century!"

"He liked it very much, sir, and I was thinking—when I could send to N——, I would get more coffee, and so make it for him whenever he likes!"

"Yes, yes—yes, little woman, yes," said Charlie, stooping and patting Mary on the head, "let him have it by all means, and, take my word for it, with a pipe to smoke, coffee to drink, and *you* by his side, Isaac Watson will never again frequent 'The Old Packhorse!'"

Charlie left the room, and Mary raised her heart in prayer and thankfulness to her God for the great mercy vouchsafed to her in Isaac's reformation, as well as for her rescue from her foes on that morning.

And so Master Charlie "twitted" Isaac with his liking for coffee; but Isaac ate a hearty breakfast, and bore all Charlie's fun with his usual good-humour. And then Charlie said,

"Now, Isaac, as I have made a man of you once more, now you may go and see your wife."

CHAPTER XXV.

OF THE SKILFUL "PHYSICIAN" WHOSE TREATMENT RESTORED PARSON HILL TO HEALTH.

PARSON HILL was lying ill of quinsy ! The vicarage was situated in its own grounds, just at the entrance of the village, on the opposite side to the smithy. The shouting and noise of the late riot had not disturbed the parson. He quietly reposed in his bed, as far as his indisposition would allow him. He objected to medical attendance ; to use his own words, "he always doctored himself."

When Charlie arrived at the vicarage on this day, Parson Hill could not speak. Such signs as could be understood he used, and, when these were valueless, he wrote his orders or his requests. But

Mary and the old woman were accidentally brought to the vicarage, and in the course of the day they learned the nature of the malady from which Parson Hill was suffering. The Widow Simpson was reputed, in the village of Lawsleigh, to possess a knowledge of "simples," as she termed them, and their uses, which was highly valued. She did not go about the moor from one place to another boasting of her skill, and pretending to effect wonderful cures, but she could relieve pain in many instances, and comfort the patient until better help arrived in extreme cases.

In the "olden time," the ladies of England had a knowledge of pharmacy that sufficed on all ordinary occasions. When the ladies discarded this knowledge from their acquirements, it fell into the hands of "old women,"—"dames," as they were called in villages. In our day, the numbers of educated gentlemen who practise medicine render an acquaintance with herbs almost unnecessary. Remote districts are reached by "the parish doctor" for the poor; and the rich do not now depend upon the skill of an unlearned old woman. To the rarely-seen "leech" of former

days, the numerous gentlemen of the faculty of the present day offer a strong contrast. To the numbers of educated ladies in former times who exerted their skill in the hour of sickness, and applied their knowledge with favourable results, the old Widow Simpson, "standing alone in her glory" on Dartmoor, also offers a strong contrast.

To Charlie's anxious mind, the vicar appeared to be getting worse, and he entreated to be allowed to send for medical help. Parson Hill would not permit this, and Charlie left the room with a sad heart. The housekeeper followed Charlie, and told him that the "old woman" said "she could cure the parson!"

"And I dare say she can," said Charlie, in a tone of hope. "She will know of some simple remedy, to which I make no doubt my dear father will submit. At all events, I will see the 'old woman' at once."

The result was that the parson yielded. He wrote upon a slate—"Let her come, *she* can do no harm."

And the "old Widow Simpson" was installed sole mistress of the ante-room leading into that

occupied by the sick man. Where there was illness the Widow Simpson made herself useful; she now set herself to work—under the parson's roof—with the same heartiness of manner and confidence in her own skill as she would have done in that of the poorest cottager. An application of hops was recommended by the old woman. Hops were always to be had at Lawsleigh Vicarage, for the parson brewed his own ale. The light-handed maidens that belonged to the vicar's establishment acted by the widow's orders. We are not going to describe the scene in Parson Hill's room, where the old woman's knowledge of a simple remedy in all probability saved his life. We shall only say that the hops were applied as directed to be; and, sooner than was anticipated, the quinsy came to a head and broke. The vicar was relieved, and in a fair way for recovery. But when all these troubles had passed away, and Charlie had once again the pleasure of a quiet talk with his wife, he said,

“It struck him as a curious thing that he should ride over the moor to see his father at that particular time; that he should reach the smithy only just in time to save the machine from being

burnt, and Mary from a fate worse than death itself ; that he should take Mary and the old woman to the vicarage to keep them in a place secure from harm until Isaac should return ; and that in taking them, he took exactly the help that was wanted ! Truly, he had been guided by the hand of God ! ”

CHAPTER XXVI.

WHICH INTRODUCES TWO NEW CHARACTERS.

THE riot in the village of Lawsleigh caused more sorrow, and made a deeper impression on the inhabitants, than even the murder of poor Hannah Barker had done ; so many were implicated in the former.

“Master Charlie” was indefatigable in searching out the ringleaders, and bringing them to justice. But as our space will not allow us to recount all the particulars of his zeal, or even the names of those who met with the punishment due to their misconduct, we must content ourselves with assuring our readers that Mary was fully satisfied with the decision of the magistrate before

whom the men appeared; but of Isaac, we fear his heart, for the time being, was made of sterner stuff.

When the officers of justice went to the "Pack-horse" to execute their orders, and seize the fat Widow Mason, she was nowhere to be found. Great search was made at the time in all her known haunts, but unsuccessfully. The little maid who attended to the customers at the "Pack-horse," and assisted the widow in her daily work, said "that a great waggon drew up at the 'Pack-horse,' and the widow knew the driver, and wanted to go with him, and see her relations; that the man agreed to take her; that she took her boxes and went, telling the maid she should return on the morrow."

But the morrow came, and many morrows, and the widow did not return. When the house came to be searched, she had taken off with her, besides her clothes, every article of value she possessed. The furniture, such as it was, was small in quantity, and poor in quality; and when the goods were sold, and the sign of the "Packhorse" taken down, there was not enough money raised to

pay the girl's wages, and the expenses of the sale.

The landlord lost his rent, but he was a young man recently come into his property; and in his walk over his estate, with a view to its future improvement, the old "Packhorse" had been included in the survey, and he had said jocosely,

"The Widow Mason had saved him from the rudeness of desiring her to find another home, for that he had another use for the 'Old Packhorse.'"

This gentleman, Mr. Tremelly, of Buckleigh Court, and the son of a former friend of Parson Hill, came, with his uncle, Mr. Ladds, on a visit to Lawsleigh Vicarage soon after the riots we have mentioned, for the purpose of examining his estate on that part of the moor.

But we have omitted to state that Mary was re-appointed schoolmistress of the village of Lawsleigh, and leader of the choir. Isaac still retained his post as head of the belfry, and none now dared dispute with him his old seat in the church at the head of the choir.

And now that the vicar and Isaac were once more on friendly terms, we need hardly add

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And Isaac continued—

“And then, you see, the old house is so good,” and Isaac looked at it with an eye of pride, for it was decidedly the best in the village. “And—and,” added he, hesitatingly, “I would not disturb my good mother.”

“True, true, Isaac,” said Mr. Tremelly, “the suggestion does you credit. But *you* must build for the next generation.. Think of it—think of it.”

And the gentlemen walked away, leaving Isaac in a state of doubt and uncertainty, unusual with him, as to what he ought to do, for the last words lingered on his ear, “You should build for the next generation.”

Isaac’s property abutted on that of Mr. Tremelly, and on examining the part immediately adjoining, the latter remarked,

“Isaac ought to build here—this position is better than where the cottage now stands, though that site was well chosen. He shall have a few acres here at a moderate price, contiguous to his own land.”

“You seem to think Isaac will fall into your

notions," said Parson Hill; "but he is like many a denizen of this moor, very sturdy in his opinions; and though certainly enlightened in an unusual degree, I fear not sufficiently so as to induce him to build for the next generation. His forefathers for several generations have occupied the same cottage he now uses. Granite is very enduring; and tradition says the Simpsons have been a hard-working, pains-taking, and orderly people, until the grandfather of this man took to the 'Packhorse,' and cast a blot upon their hitherto fair name. And Isaac, though so superior, has never changed his mode of life; every meal is taken in the same primitive simplicity as a hundred years ago, and he will not see the necessity for a new house and new ways."

"But I have two reasons to give as a proof that I am right: Isaac's little wife knows something better than the manners and customs of the moor; she will gradually introduce to his notice new forms and new ideas. While the old woman lives, I grant you, there can be no change; and also I grant it would be wrong to disturb her old age with refinements and luxuries

unheard of here, and which she would neither appreciate nor understand—as, for instance, the sewing machine;” and then, digressing from the immediate subject, and laughing cheerily, he added, “And if she endows the sewing-machine with a power of devilry, what will she say when you and I can talk to each other by means of the electric telegraph—you in your snug vicarage on the moor, I in Paris, or Constantinople, or any out-of-the-way place—in her idea of the matter? She will give up the ghost without more ado; and then, though I do not mean to be profane, and I greatly honour old age, then there will be one obstacle to the new house removed.”

CHAPTER XXVII.

COMING EVENTS CAST THEIR SHADOWS BEFORE.

“YOUR youth makes you sanguine,” said Mr. Ladds; “I candidly confess I do not go with you; and I doubt whether Isaac, or even his wife, would appreciate a house such as you would like to see built.”

“Yes, it is my youth—my glorious youth!” said Mr. Tremelly, enthusiastically, “that makes me talk for the future, build for the future—I trust not castles in the air—live for the future; and it is because Isaac is young that I feel I shall bring him over to my views. Sanguine you say I am—yes, one must be sanguine, one must march on—this is the age of wonders, of progress, I should rather say, such as no preceding century ever sur-

passed, if, indeed, it was ever equalled ;” and then, as he paused to take breath, for he had spoken with much rapidity and eagerness, he added, turning to the vicar, “but, my friend, to return to Isaac Watson—here is a backslider retracing his steps, suppose we give him a helping hand, and show him we appreciate his own efforts. I will let Isaac have the large piece of land adjoining his own at a merely nominal price, upon his promise to build a new house.”

“You are very generous,” said Parson Hill ; “and I am sure Isaac will value your kindness, even if he refuses to build.”

“It is rare, oh ! so rare, to find one drunkard retrace his steps and come back to good conduct, that I confess I feel a great interest in Isaac’s future career,” said Mr. Ladds. And then he turned to the vicar, and said, “The fact is, the change from old customs must be very gradual on this moor. You know—by experience—better than most men living, that work as hard as you will, and improve, and improve, and try this and that, you know how little can possibly be done in these remote districts, I therefore shall not marvel

if Isaac refuses to build; but I do marvel very much that, from having been a drunken and disorderly person, he is now apparently so worthy of your notice, and I give the man credit accordingly."

"Yes, as you say, and truly, change must be very gradual; and much as I have attempted, and sometimes with success, still much remains to do," said Parson Hill. "The earth and the people are always growing either better or worse. Here, on Dartmoor, until this last month or two, when Peter Barker set the example of ill-doing—here I had hoped we were getting better; but the recent, and very unpardonable, riots in Lawsleigh prove the contrary; and——"

"Oh! do not despond!" said Mr. Ladds, "for though the people ought to have known better than to make such a hubbub in the county, and do so much harm, still the Dartmoor of the present day is not the Dartmoor of fifty years ago." After a little pause, Mr. Ladds resumed—"And that fresh importation of yours, not much more than a year ago, had that no influence on Isaac? Do you think your pretty schoolmistress, whose fate

you so lamented a few weeks since—do you think she was a cipher in his estimation from the very first hour he gazed upon her?”

“Undoubtedly his honest love for Mary has been one great means of his present reformation,” said the vicar.

“I was here with my dear father,” said Mr. Tremelly, “at the opening of your new school-room. And then I saw that Isaac Watson appreciated Mary Cope. But there was a much greater difference between them then than now. Isaac is already more polished from close contact with a more delicate and refined nature than his own.”

“These things are pre-ordained,” said Mr. Ladds. “The right person is sent at the right moment, and the change that our former efforts could not produce is made in an instant.”

“True,” said the vicar; “and Isaac and Mary are the right people in the right place; together they will be a great benefit to this village.”

“For ages, as one may say,” said Mr. Ladds, “this village of Lawsleigh has had no influential person resident among its people, but the solitary clergyman. And for those centuries of time, when

civilization, which was creeping on in different parts of England, was debarred from entering on the moor, because the roads, for the vehicles then in use, were impracticable; for those ages the pastor, kind and good, and of habits almost as simple as his parishioners, was sufficient. In most cases he was farrier, doctor, lawyer, magistrate, farmer, squire, and parson—all in one."

"Right—right!" said Mr. Tremelly. "But, thank God! these times are not like those! Railways now come up to the very edge of the moor, the roads on the moor itself are infinitely better, though the hills are as lofty, the valleys as lowly as formerly, but the vales are not all swamps, nor the hills all inaccessible. They are both now made of use to man and beast. Bridges are built where formerly only a few lumbering and unsteady stones thrown into the bed of the river helped the weary traveller to get across. And soon, soon from the nostrils of the 'iron horse' will curl the smoke, as he gallantly rushes over the moor, and opens it to the 'wide, wide world.'"

"Your enthusiasm charms me!" said the vicar. "I feel as if I were growing young again,

when I listen to your graphic sketch of the future."

"And when we have bridges, and roads, and trains, and letters, and books, and electric telegraphs, shall we not have man to people this sometime desert? Shall old customs, worn threadbare long ago, remain in use when new ones are better? Shall the parson do all the work now, as he has done in these remote districts, to his credit, be it said, so nobly and so well, for ages past? No. He shall only have his fair share. For, by the blessing of God, he shall have companions. And the villagers shall know other rulers—rulers to keep them in order, it is true, but by their own good example."

Mr. Tremelly paused, and turning round to contemplate the view from the top of the hill they had just ascended, he pointed out a clump of trees in the distance.

"Do you see that group on the edge of the moor?—say some five miles off?"

"Yes—Bankerton Fort," said the vicar.

"Just so; there I mean to build my moorland home."

"You!—you!" said the vicar, raising his hands enthusiastically.

"Even I. Through Bankerton Valley to Mary Tor, then a turn to the left, not much more than three miles from Lawsleigh Vicarage. What do you say to that?"

"That I never thought to see such a sight, or have so near a neighbour in my day," said the vicar.

"Yes, I mean to build a house there, and dwell in it for a part of every year."

"And then I shall have the honour of resigning the squireship of the moor into worthy hands," said the vicar.

"But now to return to Isaac," said Mr. Tremelly, "from whom, like a young and unbroken colt, I seem to have run away. He is one of this village—he lives now where his forefathers dwelt formerly—he is essentially one of the people—in the next generation he will be looked up to—now he is envied. But even the envious and jealous reform, or die out of the way, like better-behaved people; and their children will be taught better things than to be envious and jealous, and make better

men and women, let us hope. Isaac will be one of that grand social link that unites the people with their rulers—himself one of the people, truly, but yet greatly superior to his contemporaries ; his children will probably occupy a higher rank than he—for such material will creep on, will find its way upward. They will be well educated, for Isaac values learning ; and now that I have given so full an opinion of Isaac, and prophesied so largely for his future, pray what can you tell us of his pretty wife ?”

“That though modest and almost timid in character, she is thoroughly well-principled, very well read for her position, and altogether a clever little woman—in short, just the woman who—having great confidence in her husband’s powers, as she has in Isaac’s—can be easily moulded by such a man to be a blessing to her own family and to her neighbours.”

“And as the next generation rises around her, and the cares, and enjoyments, and dignity of maternity increase upon her, will not she too improve in steadiness of purpose, in self-reliance, and in all the good that will arise from her

superior position ? Then I say, such people ought not to be left to dwell in a cottage without a solitary comfort of any kind around them. They are the pioneers of civilization for the village of Lawleigh, and as such, should now in these early days become more civilized themselves."

"Isaac will build his new house, I foresee," said the vicar, laughing.

"To be sure he will. And if you please, we will again stop at the smithy as we pass, and see what impression my parting words made upon him."

"That he must build for the next generation."

CHAPTER XXVIII.

IN WHICH ISAAC WATSON CONSENTS TO BUILD
FOR THE NEXT GENERATION.

AND Mr. Tremelly repeated his former suggestion to Isaac ; and to the worthy vicar's astonishment, Isaac only shook his head and smiled. Isaac's character was essentially firm ; and Parson Hill had expected a flat refusal on being further pressed. True, Isaac still said, "He did not see how it could be possible to do so much."

And though he readily acknowledged it would benefit future generations to have a good house ready built to their hands, he seemed to think that the old house, with a little addition, could be made to contain all that Mary and he could desire.

"Have you had your wife's opinion on this momentous subject," said Mr. Ladds, "eh, Isaac?"

"Why, no, sir. I have not seen Mary since you passed—she is at the school."

"Then tell us, Isaac," said the vicar, "which do you think she will prefer?"

"I am afraid I cannot help acknowledging that Mary has been brought up in a better house than the smithy cottage; and from such observations as I can at times make, she seems to have better ways for doing most things than I have been accustomed to see; and I know, if I ask her, she will prefer a new house."

"To be sure she will," replied Mr. Tremelly; "and she will be quite right, and you will be very glad to make her so happy, and to build one for her."

Isaac shook his head rather lugubriously this time, as he said, "No, sir; it is not in my power. And as I am not able to let her have a new house, I should carefully avoid such a subject with her."

"Not in your power?" said the vicar, laughing; "that we know to be nonsense, Isaac, for you are a rich man."

"For my present position, sir, thank God, I am," said Isaac, in humble and thankful tones.

"I do not wish you to change your position," said Mr. Tremelly; "nothing further from my thoughts. I only want you to build a new house, *instead* of adding two rooms to the old one; and tell me, why cannot this be done?"

"In the first place, sir, I have no land, or not enough—only the little bit attached to the smithy cottage; in the next, it would cost too much money; but the best reason of all is, that we do not require it."

"Not at present," said Mr. Tremelly, jocosely; "but come with me—come with me," added he, taking Isaac by the arm, for this conversation had taken place in the well-known shed, and they walked away together; while Mr. Hill explained to Mr. Ladds some of the circumstances of the late riot, and pointed out the locale.

Perhaps some twenty minutes had passed before Mr. Tremelly and Isaac returned; and then Parson Hill saw at once that Isaac would build "for the next generation." Mr. Tremelly looked very composed and quiet; but Isaac's manly features

glowed with pleasure. It was as if the two had changed places, for now Isaac had all the enthusiasm, Mr. Tremelly all the repose. And he could afford to repose, for he had brought to bear a point upon which he had set his heart. And in Isaac had been stirred new hopes, new dreams, new ambitions, new modes of benefit to himself and his neighbours. All these glittered on his brow.

“And so you have conquered,” said the vicar, as the three gentlemen walked away from the smithy cottage.

“Yes, I have made him promise to build a new house; and I have given my promise that he shall have a certain piece of ground—lying conveniently near to his own—that he shall have it mapped out, and legally transferred to him by a given day.”

“These are indeed signs of progress,” said the vicar.

“Yes; you will not have all the good work to yourself; hard as you have worked in this parish for the last—I forget how many years,” added Mr. Tremelly, laughing; “but I have been ac-

customed to hear my father speak of the time when you and he were young men together, and I learned from him that the living of Lawsleigh was no sinecure."

"What it was at that time you would hardly credit," said Mr. Ladds.

"Yes, I would; I tell you, I have heard my father say what Lawsleigh was when Mr. Hill was first inducted," and turning to the vicar, he continued, "you were then as I am now, young, sanguine, eager. If it shall please God to allow me to live as long, I shall look back with grateful thanks, if I can feel I have done in my day as much good as you in yours."

"Hush! hush!" said the vicar, deprecatingly; "you know not what you say. When you have lived as long as I, and done as little," added he, with a sigh, "you will feel inclined to say, in the words of the patriarch, 'Few and evil have the days of the years of thy servant been.'"

"Nay, nay," said Mr. Tremelly, interrupting, "I cannot permit you to storm my position; you must excuse me if I say you should not despond over the idea that you have done so little."

"Remember," said the vicar, impressively, "it is youth that gilds the future; but age looks back on the past."

"True," said Mr. Ladds; "but in this instance I agree in the opinion that to those who knew Lawsleigh when you were inducted, and who see it now, the marvel is that you have been able to do so much."

"It appears little to me now," said the vicar humbly.

"Because it contrasts strongly with the outer world," said Mr. Ladds. "The waste places of the earth cannot be put on a par with modern improvements and civilization.—But Lawsleigh thirty years ago!—and Lawsleigh now!—come, come—"

"Well, well," said the vicar, with a smile, "and at all events I have a most excellent curate, he will meet you at dinner. Now Gray is young, sanguine, eager, and I have no doubt when he understands the people he will do very well."

"When he understands the people!—that my father said was one of your great gifts—it was the secret of your success," said Mr. Tremelly.

"But the time has arrived when the people

must change," replied Mr. Ladds; "the next generation will not be like the ignorant unlettered boors of the past; their children are educating for the future; the march of the times invades their homes; and Gray, your worthy curate, is the very man to head the march, and carry the rising population with him! He was sent here just at the right time, for the right purpose!"

"He is a thoroughly good fellow," said the vicar, laughing, "but, to confess the truth, what between his crude ideas upon dress and propriety among these swamps, and his great zeal in trying to knock all old customs on the head, when he first became acquainted with the moor, I had well nigh resigned the living of Lawsleigh into his hands, and taken up my abode at Paul Tavey, for I hate worries, but I tried hard 'to hold my own,' and we understand each other better now."

"I am glad our morning's walk has turned out so well," said Mr. Tremelly.

"About Isaac's new house!—yes, indeed," replied the vicar, "but we may thank you for that. I confess to a great liking for Isaac Watson and his nice little wife."

"You picked him out from the crowd of un-gifted ones," said Mr. Ladds, "and brought his gifts to light. Isaac is your own work, in his education, in his reformation. Had you been harsh and severe during the time of his intemperance, as I confess many might have thought it right to be, he would in all probability have hardened his mind against you, and have indulged himself 'to the top of his bent.' But he always retained a respect and admiration for you, which, coupled with your forbearance, I have no doubt often saved him from temptation."

"And then," said Mr. Tremelly, "my father steps in and builds you a magnificent schoolroom, and you transplant a pretty and intelligent woman from a large and luxurious city into the very heart of dull and dreary Dartmoor!"

"Those epithets are libellous," laughed the vicar; "look at the Tors——"

"And woman has her place even in this march of civilization," said Mr. Ladds, "but a modest, comely, and sensible young woman is a prize indeed at such an epoch."

"Then you mean to say that Mary is the

right woman in the right place!" said the vicar.

"I have no doubt the handsome smith thinks so!" said Mr. Tremelly; and the gentlemen entered the vicarage.

CHAPTER XXIX.

IN WHICH MARY IS NOT ALLOWED TO "JUMP
OVER THE MOON."

WHEN Mary returned from the school, Isaac told her of the visit of the three gentlemen. And as he had made up his mind as to his future proceedings, he thought that now Mary might as well be brought to agree with him, and he set himself to work to produce the desired result.

"Mr. Tremelly, the proprietor of the greater part of Lawsleigh—that gentleman you saw in the vicarage pew on Sunday, my dear—"

"Yes, Isaac—"

"He objects to my building two rooms to the old smithy."

"He object! why, Isaac!" said Mary, in a tone of surprise, and stopping in the act of untying her bonnet.

"I told him I had promised you to build them."

"Yes; but the smithy is your own, I suppose," said Mary, coming close up to Isaac.

"It is my own," and Isaac stooped and kissed the pretty anxious-looking face.

"Then why can you not build the two rooms?"

"I never said I could not."

"You say Mr. Tremelly objects; do you mean to be guided by his opinion?"

Mary stood with her bonnet in her hand, and Isaac saw her eager wistful look.

"Yes," said Isaac.

(Oh! Isaac, Isaac!—how can you take such pains to mystify your little wife—human nature!)

He saw an expression of disappointment sadden her features in an instant; he heard her stifle a sigh as she turned away to hang up her bonnet.

"You are sorry, my dear Mary?"

"I cannot deny that, Isaac," and she still kept her back to him, that he might not see how much annoyed she really was. "But then, Isaac," re-

sumed she, "I am sure, when we have all three been preserved from so many horrors and miseries, I think I should indeed be wrong to be unhappy because you have changed your mind about the rooms."

And now, with an attempt at a smile, Mary turned round and offered her hand to Isaac. Isaac accepted it, and then would not relinquish his prize.

"You see, Mary dear, Mr. Tremelly advised me to build for the next generation." Isaac paused. But Mary's thoughts on the subject of the "next generation" were not yet awakened. "And he has been very kind to me, my dear," resumed Isaac, "he has given me a large piece of ground—that, that lies between the garden and the high road."

"All that immense piece of land, Isaac?"

"Yes; all that. And he wants me to build a new house there, and so leave the old smithy cottage untouched. It is so pretty as it is. It never ought to be altered, if we only come to think on the subject."

"Build—build a new house!" said Mary, slowly

and dubiously; "you will not do that, Isaac?"

"Well, my dear, I shall be sorry if you object, because I like to please you;" and as Mary's face was still turned to him, and as the smile was becoming more radiant every moment, he gave her another kiss; "and to confess to you the honest truth, my dear, I have promised Mr. Tremelly to build there."

Isaac's arm was now round Mary, and he held her close to him, as she replied,

"To build a new—new house?"

"To build! Yes, my dear Mary, a new house."

"Why, Isaac, then that will be much better than two rooms."

"You think so, truly—truly, Mary?"

"Yes, to be sure, yes. How I shall like a new house, all your very own, Isaac!"

And Mary's eyes sparkled now.

"Then you won't fret much about the loss of the two rooms?"

"Fret, Isaac! what nonsense! Why, I am so happy, I could jump over the moon!"

"Do not theed do that, Ma-ary," said the old woman, shaking her head. "For though the moon doth

look near to the earth at odd times, I never heard tell in all my days as anybody could touch it!"

"I will hold her fast, mother," said Isaac.

"Mother, I *am* so happy!" said Mary.

"Ay, wench, ay; and I be glad as you be happy. But don't thee go for to jump over the moon—don't thee try to, when the lad lets thee loose. If thee was to try, Ma-ary, and then tumble thyself down a-tother side of the moon, my belief us should never find thee again."

"Promise not to try, Mary," said Isaac, "or I shall still hold you fast."

And Mary hid her laughing face on Isaac's shoulder, and gave her promise; and Isaac set her at liberty.

In the course of conversation, when the gentlemen were at dinner at the vicarage, Mr. Gray said,

"I was in hopes you would raze the 'Packhorse' to the ground."

"That would be short-sighted, would it not?" said Mr. Tremelly.

"What! will you not do away with the 'Old Packhorse'?" continued Mr. Gray.

I should rather like to let the old horse work on," said Mr. Tremelly, with a smile. "He has been a good servant in his day. When there were no roads for wheel-carriages, he traversed them; when there were no waggons, no coaches, no railways, he carried the people; when there were no postage-stamps, he carried the letters, paid and unpaid. It is true, he has grown old; but, for my part, I like old servants. New modes, new ideas, science, the arts, and civilization, if you will, but *old* servants, if you please. I like to make them comfortable in their old age; and as they have spent their youth in honourably doing their duty, so I should like to do my duty, and let them spend their old age happily, and unencumbered by cares."

"I confess I do not understand what you propose to do with the 'Old Packhorse,'" said Mr. Ladds.

"And if you and the vicar do not understand me, I shall not much wonder, seeing that it is time you two old servants of the public"—Mr. Ladds being also a clergyman—"were unencumbered by cares of any kind. Your mines have been pretty

well worked, and good ore has been plentifully produced. But Mr. Gray is young ; his mine is full of rich veins of ore, unworked, unused ; he should join me in renewing the youth of the ‘ Old Packhorse.’ ”

Mr. Gray smiled, but remained silent, for he did not understand Mr. Tremelly.

CHAPTER XXX.

HOW MASTER CHARLIE AND JAMES MARVEL WENT
IN OPPOSITION TO THE POWERS THAT BE.

IN less than a year after the events just narrated, for it was in the month of September, 1863, a carriage stopped at the "old smithy," as it was now called, from which a gentleman alighted, and the carriage drove on.

"Well, Isaac, and how are you?" said Master Charlie—for it was he, and he shook Isaac's hand heartily; "and tell me of the good widow—the last report was not favourable."

"Thank you," said Isaac, "she has rallied quite beyond our hopes, and even goes backwards and forwards to the 'New Smithy'"—as Isaac's new house was called—"several times a day."

Isaac and Mary, and a baby only a fortnight old, now lived in the new house. The Widow Simpson, by her own choice, remained in the "Old Smithy," and at night the little moor maiden, whose duty it was to attend upon Mary in her new home, slept at the "Old Smithy," to be near the Widow Simpson, if she at any time required care or assistance.

"My wife and boy are gone on to the Vicarage," said Charlie. "Mary is getting on well, I hear; and her boy is a fine specimen of the human race!"

"Yes, thank you, Master Charlie, Mary is doing very well; and for the boy," added Isaac, laughing, "my mother says 'the little one is a 'normous big one!'"

"Good old creature! I cannot stay to see her now; but I would not pass you, Isaac, and not shake you by the hand, and tell you how glad I am to see you so prosperous and so happy."

"You are very good," said Isaac, in a grateful tone. "The parson told me you would be sure to come before the month was out, and that your boy was to be christened here."

"Yes, we are come for that important event, and Mary is to bring her boy at the same time; is it not so arranged? Mine is to be called William Charles, after father and grandfather, who is also godfather. And how, pray, how do you call yours, Isaac?" continued Charlie, as a mischievous smile spread broadly over his face.

A slight touch of Isaac's former shyness seemed to come over him at this moment; it was a second or two before he replied.

"I *do* think one name quite enough—I confess it, Master Charlie; but Mary says the boy must be called Baldwin Isaac; and as Mr. Tremelly and the vicar say it is all right, I suppose it is."

"Of course it is. So then you have—like me—given the names of father, grandfather, and godfather. And would you have Mr. Tremelly come and offer himself to stand godfather, and then not give his name to the child? Isaac! Isaac! 'it most mazes I!'" said Charlie, laughing; and then, holding out his hand, he continued: "Well, old fellow, we were boys together—and fortunately that was before you became such a 'sad dog,' and so you did not lead me into scrapes

—but now we are men, and, by the blessing of God, our children shall play together, and gladden the hearts of their parents. Good-bye; my wife will come and see Mary as soon as she can; no doubt they mean to compare babies—my wife is very proud of hers!”

And Charlie walked away, with the glow of bright good-nature glittering on his handsome face.

Isaac’s position was gradually altering, as Mr. Tremelly had foreseen. He employed more men now; for, since the Exhibition, he had turned his attention to the making of ingenious and safe locks, and had met with success beyond his hopes.

So Isaac had given up the great hammer, and turned the large room at the “Old Smithy” into a sort of work-shop for himself, where all the neater parts of his handicraft were done. And so still the old Widow Simpson sat knitting by Isaac’s side, excepting only at such times as she chose to “stretch her old legs a bit, and take another good look to that there big leetle ’un’ as most mazed she!”

And when the christening took place, the old

Widow Simpson, though she had not been able to get to church for the last few weeks, would not be left at home. She must stand near the font, to give her blessing to the little ones as soon as they were received into the Church.

When the several queries in the baptismal service were put by the officiating minister, Mr. Gray, the responses were made in the clear and manly voice of the vicar himself; and when was said, "Name this child" to Mrs. Hill's boy, the vicar replied, "William Charles;" and when the same was said to Mary's boy, Mr. Tremelly replied, "Baldwin Isaac;" and the two gentlemen took upon themselves the duties of "God-parents" to the children.

And the aged Widow Simpson, still following the custom of bygone times, stopped the infants as they were taken from the font, and, putting her hands first upon one and then on the other, distinctly gave a blessing.

When the service was over, and Isaac and his party turned to leave the church, he could not help inwardly noticing how vigorous, for her age, the good widow seemed. She appeared to have sud-

denly regained a strength she had not had for many months ; and when this apparent re-juvenisation continued, Isaac at length told Mary of the great pleasure he had in watching the old woman step from one house to the other several times a day, and appear all the better for the exertion.

“ Well, Isaac,” said Mary, in her simplicity, “ I always said to myself, if mother could only live till baby was born, that then she might take up again ; because you see the dear little fellow is more to her than her own child ; for I have been told all grandmothers—and she is more, Isaac, she is a great-grandmother—‘ live again in their children’s children.’ And so you see it is quite true, for she seems to gather new life.”

Isaac smiled at Mary’s deduction, but he said,

“ No doubt you are right, my dear, for it is plain she is in excellent health, and as happy as the day is long. Nothing but praises to God and thanks to Him for preserving her to see my boy and hold him in her arms, excepting my dear blessings on your head and on mine !”

“ And I have such faith in the prayers and blessings of the aged and the good,” said Mary.

"And so have I," said Isaac.

Only on the morrow after this conversation were Isaac and Mary startled at their dinner by the "little maid" running from the "Old Smithy" to say that "the widdy be tooked bad."

Mary put her infant in the cradle, and followed Isaac immediately. They found the old woman seated in a luxurious easy-chair, newly imported by Isaac, and a present to the widow on her ninety-sixth birthday—her eyes closed, her lips inaudibly muttering. They gave her a cordial which partially restored her, and she then asked to be carried to bed.

"Ma-ary—Ma-ary, blessings on thee, my lass, for a good kind heart! I be going to leave thee, Isaac, my lad."

She was at length placed comfortably in bed, but she was still alive to this world.

"That there—big—leetle un—" she gasped at intervals, and the child was fetched, but she was fast sinking.

She stretched out her hand and touched the little head; the word "blessing" was all that could be heard.

After a few minutes of repose, she said,

“Isaac, lad—the saule bell—to call the cheery passon.”

“Ay, mother,” said Isaac, as he saw her close her eyes and doze again.

Now, as it happened, in this eventful year, when some “old customs” still lingered on the moor, “the new curate,” Mr. Gray, had worked hard, and with considerable success, to introduce “new customs,” to do away with, what he called, the remnants of Popery, and establish such as are in use among the Protestants now.

What the Widow Simpson called “the saule bell” was no longer heard in Lawsleigh; and Isaac, with his heart full of sorrow at the sudden and very serious illness of his aged relative, and regret that the custom had not lingered to the end of her days, hastily walked to the vicarage for Parson Hill, and he reasoned with himself as he went on his way—“If she sees the parson by her bed-side, she will think he came at the ‘call of the bell.’”

And Isaac sent in his message, and the vicar sent out word he would be at the “Old Smithy” in a few minutes.

As Isaac returned over the vicarage lawn, he met Charlie, and the two young men exchanged a word or two; and Isaac explained that, instead of going to the belfry, as in years gone by he should have considered his duty, to call the parson by the sound of the bell, he had been to tell the vicar that the Widow Simpson was dying.

As Isaac ascended the stairs at the "Old Smithy," to his grandmother's dying bed, to his surprise and satisfaction the great tenor bell rang out that famous "clang, clang, clang," that the Widow Simpson, in the earlier chapters of this book, had described to Susan Picard as "calling the parson."

"Ay, ay, lad, they be a-calling the passon, God bless them!" said she, waking up as Isaac re-entered the room. She dozed again for an instant or two, and then said, "Tell I when the cheery passon comes, Ma-ary—coz why? I canna see, my eyesight be gone."

But yet she retained her other faculties, and was able to assure her kind relatives that she was free from pain, and to reply to the few queries put to her. But she repeated several times, as the

very aged do, "that now that she had seen Isaac's son, and knew that the lad—as she called Isaac—was happy with Ma-ary by his side, she was content to die."

Now the vicar himself, as he too hastened to the dying bed of the widow, was startled by the clang, clang, clang, of that bell.

"Humph!—now that is Isaac—of course it is. No one else in this parish would dare to do such a thing without my permission. I really did think better of him—so intelligent and sensible a man should not, on any occasion, or for any one, go in opposition to the powers that be. I must make some excuse for him to Gray, for he will be very clamorous at this return to popery, after all the trouble he has taken to root up old customs from the face of the land. And yet I daresay Isaac saw that the old woman would not die contented if she did not hear 'the soul bell'—I must tell Gray."

By this time he had arrived at the "Old Smithy." What, then, was his astonishment to see Isaac kneeling by the bedside of his aged relative, and covering her hand with caresses, for still the bell

pealed on. Though now it had changed to the solemn "boome, boome, boome," that the old woman had explained to Susan "called upon all good Christians to leave their daily work, and pray for peace to the dying soul."

In less than ten minutes after Mr. Hill's arrival, the old Widow Simpson spoke for the last time.

"Don't fret, Ma-ary—I be happy—and God Almighty—bless the passon, and all his family, and the lad—and—I hear they be chiming—chiming—"

These were her last words; but her imagination, or rather her knowledge, of what must follow had misled her. The bell still tolled the solemn toll for the dying—the call to prayer; and it was only when, by the little maid from the smithy, word was sent to the belfry that the widow was dead, that the chime broke out that was supposed to "Call us to thankfulness for our brother's or sister's deliverance."

"Strange again!" said the vicar to himself, as he walked homeward; "it is plain Isaac has no hand in this—who can have done it? There,

now they chime—well, well, *I* am very glad, for the sake of the poor old woman, brought up in such customs.”

“And so the old Widow Simpson is gone to her long home?” said Charlie, when he met the vicar at dinner.

“Yes, she went suddenly at last, as such aged ones often do; for they tell me she has been unusually strong and well since the christening—the last bright gleam from the dying light. But I cannot think who could dare to ring out the ‘soul bell.’”

“I did,” said Charlie.

“You! You could not ring the tenor without help!”

“No, and so I took Marvel with me. The vicar’s son, and the vicar’s servant, have dared to fly in the face of Gray!”

Parson Hill leaned back in his chair, and did not speak.

“I am heartily glad you did revive the old custom, Charlie, just for the old woman’s sake,” said Mrs. Hill.

Still the parson remained silent; but Mrs. Hill thought she saw him put his finger to the corners of his eyes before he resumed his dinner. When he spoke it was almost in a whisper.

"Charlie, boy! upon my word I cannot think what Gray will say!"

"Nor can I," said Charlie; "but if he should be so unreasonable as to speak to me on the subject, I am afraid I shall tell him that I would have rung that bell while the Widow Simpson lay dying, if it had cost Lawsleigh another riot!"

"Charlie!" said the vicar. "Why, the men are still at their hard labour, would you like to join them?"

"Joking apart, the exception proves the rule," said Charlie.

"And having proved your rule, change your subject!" said Mrs. Hill.

And the heavy boom of the "soul-bell" was never heard again at the village of Lawsleigh-on-the-Moor.

CHAPTER XXXI.

OF THE HILLS AND THE DALES, AND "THE OLD
PACKHORSE."

EVENTUALLY the cottage that had borne so disreputable a character while belonging to the Widow Mason, became a dwelling of a large size. A house of call—as it had always been—for all wayfarers crossing the moor, where hot coffee and refreshment could be had for the men, and stabling and provender for their horses; from whence an omnibus went daily to and from the station at N——, for the convenience of Lawsleigh, and even of more distant villages, carrying passengers and parcels. The daily papers were to be had;

there was also a reading-room, suitable for men of the class likely to congregate there; and it was a telegraph station, connected with Exeter, Plymouth, and the Dartmoor Prisons. The sign was a railway train, crowded with passengers, the name of the engine "The Old Packhorse!"

And so "The Old Packhorse" of the last century emerged young and gay from the ashes of the Widow Mason's cottage. And still he bears his burden cheerfully; still he brings comfort and joy to many, and, if sorrow to some, it is the lot of mortals; but, as Mr. Tremelly said to Mr. Gray, "We should never forget, or seek to put aside, 'The Old Packhorse,' the time-honoured servant of man!"

But we have neither time nor space to describe the gay doings at the opening of the new building, or the astonishment of the simple villagers of Lawsleigh. Tho vicar said, as he shook the Lord of the Manor by the hand:

"This day has exceeded my most sanguine hopes, for right good progress you have made in your present short reign!"

"And it is progress among the Tors and the

Valleys," said Charlie; "the most difficult piece of civil engineering in the world!"

"I deny that," said Mr. Tremelly, "upon the principle that there can be no difficulties between friends and neighbours; for it is well known that the hills and the dales have never parted company since the world began!"

"But the hills always look down upon the dales!" said Mrs. Hill, "notwithstanding their great friendship."

"I shall not bandy words with a lady," said Mr. Tremelly; "but this much I will say, in the presence of this august gathering, that my 'Parson Hill,'" patting the vicar on the back, "is equal to any 'Parson Dale' that ever charmed a reading world!"

"Only he lives and dies in obscurity," said Charlie.

"Say, rather," said Mr. Tremelly, "he has not had the good fortune to be immortalized by the greatest writer of this or any other day!"

"We cannot have every thing, can we?" said Charlie, to the vicar.

"Send your shafts home into the very hearts of

the 'Hills,' if you will!" said the vicar; "but pray allow the worthy 'Dale' to enjoy his well-deserved supremacy in peace!"

THE END.



